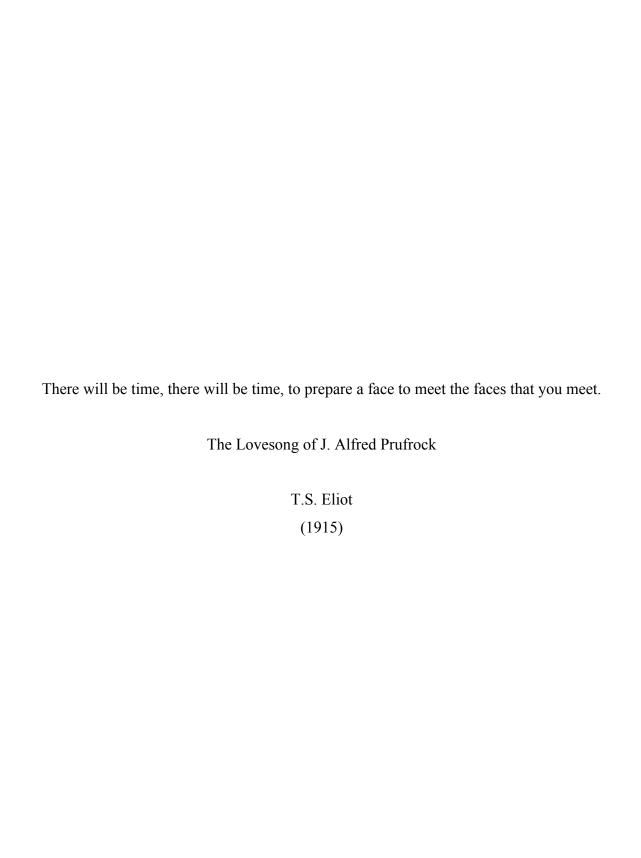# UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF DIALOGIC FEEDBACK WITHIN ASSESSMENT FEEDBACK TUTORIALS

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Brighton for the degree of Doctor of Education

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There will be time, there will be time, to prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet.

The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock

T.S. Eliot
(1915)

Abstract

High quality assessment feedback is crucial to effective student learning, motivation and academic progress. It is one of the most important aspects of an undergraduate student's study experience and acts as a critical factor in the way students perceive both their learning and learner identity. However, annual National Student Survey (NSS) results continue to reveal that undergraduate students are least satisfied with their experiences of assessment and feedback when compared to other areas on which the NSS focuses. These results have raised important questions within the higher education (HE) profession about the fitness for purpose of current forms of assessment feedback. As such, a reappraisal of assessment feedback policies and practices sits high within the sector's improvement agenda.

In response to these concerns, there is a small but growing field of research that promotes dialogic feedback and the inclusion of opportunities for assessment feedback discussions between tutors and undergraduate students. Framed by socio-constructivist theorisations of learning, proponents claim that such assessment feedback discussions benefit students through developing their personal confidence and capacity to self-direct learning. Paradoxically, however, in spite of research evidence showing that students support the inclusion of these tutorial meetings, personal experience reveals a reluctance by some students to engage in discussion about their assessment performance.

Through a phenomenological research design, the thesis aimed to gain a deeper understanding of students' experiences and perceptions of discussing their performance with their marking tutor. Research participants included eight second-year, full-time undergraduate social science students. Each student participated in semi-structured interviews exploring their experiences of assessment feedback tutorials (AFT). The transcribed data was analysed using a six-stage Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) model.

The research makes an original contribution to knowledge relating to both the practice and theory of dialogic feedback in undergraduate study. Specifically, the findings posit that some students face a significant predicament when discussing weak and/or failed assignments. Their desire to self-promote and/or self-protect a confident and capable learner identity, not only conflicts with their own self-awareness of their poor academic performance, but also with the

tutor's expectations that students need to undertake greater responsibility for their own learning and academic performance.

As a means of managing this tension, and the emotional pressures that an AFT creates, students draw upon a range of self-presentational behaviours to manage how they project themselves to their tutor. The thesis concludes that such strategic management of their self-presentation restricts opportunities for the critical dialogic exchanges needed to create co-constructive student/tutor relationships and deep learning. As such, it is recommended that, within undergraduate study, there is increased focus on supporting students to understand the role that dialogue plays in engaging with feedback and the personal learning opportunities it affords.

CONTENTS

Acronyms

AFT – Assessment feedback tutorial

DF – Dialogic feedback

EdD – Educational Doctorate

HE – Higher Education

NSS – National Student Survey

SCL – Student-centred learning

UoB – University of Brighton

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Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my parents who have encouraged and celebrated my learning at all stages in my life. They continue to inspire me, through their faith and encouragement in all that I do.

Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed:

Dated:

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Within this opening chapter, I present a rationale for the study, detailing my own professional background and interest in the research area. The following sub-headings are used to structure the chapter.

1.2 Rationale
1.3 Research aim and questions
1.4 Summary

1.2 Rationale

Having taught within the United Kingdom (UK) higher education (HE) sector for over a decade, I currently work at the University of Brighton (UoB), School of Education as a Deputy Head of School for Learning and Teaching. UoB is a post-1992 university, and has been part of the city of Brighton and Hove since 1859. The University has more than 21,000 students and 2,800 staff studying and working at five campuses in Brighton, Eastbourne and Hastings. Within the University, the School of Education (SoE) is one of the largest departments and is recognised nationally as one of the UK's major providers of education and teacher training. The School's work spans all phases of learning and development, from the early years through to adult education, and currently has over 1,200 students registered on courses (School of Education, University of Brighton, 2016).

In addition to a wide variety of teaching, research and management duties, my primary strategic role is to lead on pedagogic developments, to ensure the very highest learning experience for all students within the SoE. A significant part of this pedagogic leadership responsibility is to support the University's critical objective of improving undergraduate student satisfaction with their assessment and feedback experiences. This increasing demand is, in part, a direct response to the current political climate within the English HE sector that, I argue, positions students as consumers of higher learning. Concern for student/consumer satisfaction is reinforced by quantitative surveys, such as the annual National Student Survey (NSS). The NSS gathers opinions and feedback from final year undergraduate students about their study experiences. National results show that although student satisfaction with assessment and feedback has

steadily improved over the last decade (i.e. from 62% in 2006 to 74% in 2016) it continues to lag behind all other pedagogic areas on which the NSS focuses (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2016). The terms 'assessment feedback' and 'feedback' will be used synonymously throughout this thesis. A more detailed discussion of the NSS data is provided in the following chapter.

Within the performative culture dominating the HE sector, UK undergraduate students are expected to pay up to £9,250K per annum for tuition fees (UoB fees as from 2017/18). Thus, it is unsurprising that there is a substantial managerial agenda to improve all NSS scores, with particular attention on assessment feedback (Arora, 2010). As such, ensuring student satisfaction of assessment and feedback experiences – in all undergraduate courses – has risen to the top of HE improvement agenda (Sambell, 2016). Hounsell (2007) summarises a bleak, yet familiar, picture that continues to be current:

> Student disenchantment mounts when the feedback they get on their undergraduate work is too sparsely uninformative, or unconstructive, or comes too late to be of much practical use. Their faith in its value to them as learners therefore begins to wane. At the same time, staff who are already hard-pressed to mark and comment systematically on assignments and assessments find growing indications of students not taking feedback seriously, alongside diminishing evidence that their feedback has 'made a difference' to the quality of the work students produce. Some students, it appears, do not even bother to collect work that has been marked and commented upon, while others do collect it but seem only interested in what mark they got. Staff commitment to providing helpful feedback can therefore become increasingly undermined (pp. 102-103).

Against this assessment feedback landscape, over the course of my academic career I have developed a keen professional research interest in gaining critical understanding of the factors that influence students' positive and negative experiences of receiving feedback on assessed work. Key milestones in my learning journey, prior to commencing the Educational Doctorate (EdD), included completing my Masters in Education (MAEd) dissertation exploring teaching students' experiences of mentor feedback, as well as presenting a paper at academic conference with a specific focus on student engagement with assessment (Harrison and Wallis, 2010).

More recently, studying for the EdD has afforded the opportunity to deepen my critical understanding of undergraduate student experiences of engaging with assessment feedback and to problematise further this complex and highly personal element of the learning process. The three assignments, presented within the first stage of the EdD, helped to refine my thesis

research questions, as well as develop my experience as a researcher. At the point of presenting my proposal at Research Panel Approval meeting, my focus had evolved to concentrate specifically on the exploration of undergraduate student experiences and perceptions of one specific mode of feedback, namely dialogic feedback (DF). For the purposes of this research, DF is understood to be:

> …a system of guidance that provides not only a summative judgement of performance, but support through opportunities for a discussion which identifies areas of improvement and scaffolds support for the student to achieve higher grades (Beaumont et al., 2011, p.674).

This research focuses upon exploring DF as a 'system of guidance' in a tutorial context, known as an assessment feedback tutorial (AFT). These tutorials support students in understanding and engaging with the written feedback provided as part of the summative assessment. As such, within the context of this research, DF is viewed as a 'follow-up' or complimentary experience for students wishing to gain further clarification of their tutors' written feedback and/or grade. Thus, it does not replace the primary mode of feedback at my University, which is a written commentary accompanied by a percentage grade.

The decision to focus my research upon DF, rather than other forms of assessment feedback, was due to a number of reasons. First, through sustained engagement with the literature over the course of the EdD, I have been inspired by writers such as Carless (2006), Nicol (2009), Pryor and Crossouard (2005) and Boud (2009) who make claims as to the meta impact that DF can have upon student agency and ability to self-direct their learning. As Hyatt (2005) asserts, DF offers students, "…a position from which to challenge, a 'critical inclusion' in the community, so they are not simply disempowered apprentices whose role is to follow and reproduce" (p.351). Thus, through such DF exchanges with both peers and tutors, students develop learning orientations that are more self-regulating (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). These claims acted as a personal motivation to learn more about this specific mode of feedback and how it may impact upon both University policy and practice. Significantly, I wanted to understand how students perceived and experienced DF within their study, as the literature converges around the need for more detailed research to be undertaken in this area. Second, the literature concurs that undergraduate students perceive DF as a highly valuable experience (National Union of Students, 2012; Price et al., 2010; Beaumont et al., 2011). From a personal perspective, I have become increasingly conscious within my own institution of students

requesting further opportunities to meet with their tutors to discuss issues regarding assessment feedback.

Although students' wish for more opportunities to meet with tutors is increasing within the School of Education, there is an interesting conflict which acts as the third motive for electing to focus upon DF. To explain this conflict, I share a critical incident that occurred at a UoB 'Assessment and Feedback Strategy Day'. As part of the agenda, a Student Union representative – Lucy (all student names used in thesis are pseudonyms) – was presenting feedback about what undergraduate students desired most from tutor feedback. She conveyed a strong message that students wanted more direct contact with their tutors to discuss their feedback, as a means of making sense of the guidance given. At the end of the presentation, Lucy was asked a direct question from a colleague regarding why some students did not always attend AFTs that were offered to individuals to discuss their assessment feedback. Lucy's response is reproduced below:

> Lucy: Yeah. Meeting your tutor to talk about your assignment grade, does bring up a lot of feelings and stuff. But it is really helpful… Hmm. But, err… it's not straight forward especially when you are talking about your work with the person who marked it. And… hmm… especially if the work has failed or you're not pleased with it… or the grade you've been given. I know we're all adults but… it's complicated – from a student's point of view… it can be the last thing you want to do. Even if you know you should and it'll be good for you. You don't want to always face the music!

Lucy's tacit viewpoint offered me a critical insight into the complexity of students' perspectives regarding the social and emotional challenges that some individuals may encounter when meeting with their tutors to discuss assessment feedback. Although I had several hunches as to why this might be (particularly if the work had failed) I realised that my rationalisations were through the lens of a lecturer and not the undergraduate learner. Deeper reflection upon Lucy's response raised many important questions for both my professional practice and research, including: what makes the event of meeting with a tutor "…not straightforward" for some students and – if students do get to "face the music" – then how do they rationalise their lived-experience? Mindful that "…giving and receiving feedback occurs within complex contexts, and so mediated by power relationships and the nature of the predominant discourse" (Higgins et al., 2001, p.273), I aim to illuminate these and other questions relating to undergraduate students' experiences and perceptions of DF.

Whilst this research does not dispute the powerful influence dialogue has within learning, it sets out to critically explore some of the assertions made within the literature regarding the impact DF can have. Thus, I have approached this research with an open-mind, aiming to gain insight into students' experiences and perceptions of DF within AFTs. It is hoped that the outcomes of this research will contribute to the existing theoretical field of DF, as well as informing future policy and practice.

1.3 Research aim and questions

This qualitative study aims to explore in detail, eight undergraduate students' experiences and perceptions of DF within AFT contexts. The research approach taken is interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) which is a systematic methodology that aims to understand the 'lived' experience of participants through the interpretative work on the part of the researcher (Smith and Osborn, 2015).

A more detailed examination of IPA is offered in the Methodology (see Chapter 4). However, in presenting this study's research aims, I draw upon Smith and Osborn's (2015) advice that "Research questions in IPA projects are usually framed broadly and openly. There is no attempt to test a predetermined hypothesis of the researcher; rather, the aim is to explore, flexibly and in detail, an area of concern" (p.28).

Hence, the study aims to interpret and make meaning of undergraduate experiences and perceptions of dialogic feedback within the context of AFTs. Building on this aim, four initial explorative research questions were developed.

1. What do undergraduate students perceive the nature of dialogic feedback to be?
2. How do undergraduate students understand the purpose of dialogic feedback?
3. How do undergraduate students describe their emotions and feelings relating to dialogic feedback experiences?
4. Within the context of dialogic feedback, how do undergraduate students perceive their relationship with the marking tutor?

A fifth research question was added in the latter stages of the study as a result of sustained engagement with the literature and reflection upon the findings generated from the first four questions (see above). The fifth and final question is shown below.

5. Is there evidence within the data of students strategically managing their DF experience through the use of self-presentational behaviours? If so, what meaning can be made from this?

1.4 Summary

Assessment feedback plays a critical role in the learning lives of undergraduate students. Within the English university system, continuing concerns regarding undergraduate students' ongoing dissatisfaction with their experience of assessment and feedback has prompted the profession to look at other forms of feedback, such as DF. However, I argue that future DF policy and practice must be informed by research that has sought to gain deeper understanding of students' perspectives of the phenomenon and the implications it may have upon their learning.

The following chapter will explore the context of the research, focusing upon the policy discourses framing undergraduate learning.

CHAPTER 2: POLICY CONTEXT

2.1 Introduction

Having outlined the rationale for the study and my personal reasons as to why I have elected to focus upon exploring undergraduate students' perceptions and experiences of DF, this chapter offers an overview of the political background and context of assessment feedback within the English HE sector. Consideration will be given to key policy issues that frame student expectation and experience of assessment feedback, and discussion will detail how and why this has become of central concern to ensuring student satisfaction and institutional effectiveness. The final section of the chapter will concentrate on specific assessment feedback policy from the institution in which the research is based and where all eight research participants studied.

The chapter is sub-headed as follows:

2.2 The English Higher Education landscape

2.3 Market forces and performativity

2.4 Assessing the impact of the National Student Survey (NSS) upon assessment and feedback.

2.5 Improving undergraduate students' experiences of assessment feedback

2.6 Undergraduate assessment and feedback policy within University of Brighton

2.7 Addendum to University of Brighton assessment feedback policy

2.8 Summary

2.2 The English Higher Education landscape

> The character of higher education in Britain is rapidly changing. Any short glance at recent reports and commentary in the higher education press reveals a range of competing worries and fears. There are voices of concern for maintaining either 'quality' or 'standards', or both (Streeting and Wise, 2009, p.1)

Over the last twenty years, the English HE system has seen a number of wide-sweeping changes, including a significant rise in student numbers, an increase in the diversity of the student population, and an unprecedented focus on student experience and satisfaction (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011). In 2011, the Coalition Government's attempt to put HE on a 'sustainable footing' led to the publication of the White Paper, 'Higher

Education: Students at the Heart of the System' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011) which permitted universities to raise undergraduate student fees to £9,000 per annum. In doing so, the UK Government stated that:

> By shifting public spending away from teaching grants and towards repayable tuition loans, we have ensured that higher education receives the funding it needs even as substantial savings are made to public expenditure. Second, institutions must deliver a better student experience; improving teaching, assessment, feedback and preparation for the world of work. Third, they must take more responsibility for increasing social mobility (Ibid. p.4).

Concurrent with the radical changes imposed upon student fees at this time, the Government continued with a trend of reducing centralised funding for HE. A total of £940m was cut from the budget for teaching, research and buildings in that year which amounted to a 12.6% cut (Shepherd, 2011). The result has been increased competition within the HE marketplace, with stringent targets for both admissions and student retention being set and monitored. However, even prior to the major cuts experienced by the sector in 2011, Miller (2010) pointed out that there had been an "…increased emphasis on the commercial relevance of university courses which was anathema to the values of the academy, resulting from the widespread adoption of neo-liberal policies towards education" (p.199). Such a seismic shift towards neo-liberal policy has introduced an unparalleled level of competition between institutions and positioned students as consumers of a:

> …market-infused approach to education that treats knowledge as a commodity whose exchange value is measured crudely by comparing the cost of acquiring a degree (tangible certification of "product" acquisition) with the financial earnings the degree supposedly enables (Schwartzman, 2013, p.2).

Fuelled by concern for consumer expectations and rights, many English universities have felt pressure to respond to business forces of supply and demand through the increased status and proliferation of league tables, satisfaction surveys and charters. The neo-liberal trend has been further entrenched into the sector through the more recent publication of the White Paper, "Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice" (Department for Business, Skills and Innovation, 2016). Within this Paper, the Government set out a clear agenda that aimed to "…continue to set a high bar on quality to ensure that providers are delivering value for money for students and taxpayers" (Department for Business, Skills and Innovation, 2016, p.18). Such consumer expectation now has legal protection in the form of the newly created Competition and Markets Authority.

As a means of ensuring this drive towards centralised regulation and accountability, a newly formed market regulator, the Office for Students, has been established in 2017, which aims to promote and protect the student interest. This non-departmental public body will "…be given a statutory duty to assess the quality and standards of the HE sector and be responsible for allocating teaching grant funding and for monitoring the financial sustainability, efficiency and overall health of the sector" (Department for Business, Skills and Innovation, 2016, p.5). The role of the Office for Students includes annual data monitoring of institutions' performance against key indicators including:

- Graduate employment

- Progression to professional jobs and postgraduate study

- Student retention levels

- Student completion levels

- Student recruitment levels

- Degree outcomes

- Student entry requirements/UCAS tariff data

- National Student Survey results

- Number of complaints to the Office of Independent Adjudicator

- Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) scores.

(Department for Business, Skills and Innovation, 2016)

One key indicator used to evaluate institutional performance is the newly created Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) that all English universities have been invited to opt into (the University in which the research was undertaken has opted into the TEF). Participating universities submit both qualitative and quantitative data pertaining to their undergraduate teaching, learning environment and student outcomes (which includes NSS results for categories of teaching and learning, assessment and feedback, and academic support). Institutional TEF standards are graded using a gold, silver or bronze award. The UoB received a silver award in 2017, the first year of TEF submission. The publication of TEF outcomes is intended to support students' decision on what and where to study. The current Government asserts that through the TEF initiative, the self-esteem of teachers will be raised through rewarding excellent practice as and where it is identified.

Critically, for universities' fiscal management, the outcome of TEF will also have implications as to whether institutions can increase their tuition fees:

> The Government has previously indicated that universities and colleges in England that have a TEF award will be able to increase their tuition fees in line with inflation. The Department for Education will confirm the 2018-19 fee caps in due course. Providers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are able to take part in the TEF, with no direct impact on their tuition fees (HEFCE, 2017, n.p.).

With the TEF still very much in its infancy it is difficult to judge the impact it will have upon the sector, or on students' experiences of 'excellent teaching' from 'excellent teachers'. Collini (2016) projects that, in its current format, the TEF will generate a lot of 'activity' other than that directly related to ensuring better quality teaching.

> So what will the TEF actually produce? At a minimum, the following: more administrators to administer the TEF; a greater role for business in shaping the curriculum and forms of teaching; a mountain of prose in which institutions describe, in the prescribed terms, how wonderful their provision and procedures are. It also seems pretty certain to produce more efforts by universities to make sure their NSS scores look good; more pressure on academics to do whatever it takes to improve their institution's overall TEF rating; and more league tables, more gaming of the system, and more disingenuous boasting by universities about being in the 'top ten' for this or that. What is it unlikely to produce? Better quality teaching (p.36).

Thus, measures such as TEF, which primarily service the marketing machinery of HE, will continue to produce a culture of performativity within the sector, positioning universities into tangible hierarchies of desirability and exclusivity. As some commentators have observed, the aggressive market values and the plethora of accompanying measurable indices, have framed the learning experience as a contract to be bought and sold.

> The centrality – some would say the tyranny – of the National Student Survey (NSS) along with similar local mechanisms of client satisfaction and the production of information in Key Information Sets (KIS) as well as publicly available league tables for employability and a whole range of other 'success criteria', have combined to create a fractious atmosphere of commercial transaction in some areas (Berry and Edmond, 2014, p.70).

The Government defends this marketised ideology and political strategy, stating that, "Competition between providers in any market incentivises them to raise their game, offering consumers a greater choice of more innovative and better-quality products and services at lower cost". It argues that "higher education is no exception" (Department for Business, Skills

and Innovation, 2016, p.8) and that "customer satisfaction" can, and will, be raised through the expansion of "individual choice and competition" (Needham, 2003, pp.5-6). However, as Giroux (2015) argues, driving competition into the sector defines it "…more and more as simply another core element of corporate power and culture, viewed mostly as a waste of taxpayers' money, and denied its value as a democratic public sphere and guardian of public values" (n.p.). Critics of the new commercial culture fear that HE – as a place for "…intense public discourse, passionate learning, and vocal citizen involvement in the issues of the times" (Scott, 2012, cited in Giroux, 2015) – will become irreversibly lost as individual institutions fight for their very survival within an increasingly aggressive and unpredictable marketplace.

The commodification of HE, increasingly concerned about its accountability to consumer satisfaction will, according to Lea (2011), "…ultimately result in universities being driven by market forces where intellectual membership is devalued and made subservient to management and an organisational strategy" (p.19). Giroux (2012) concurs with Lea's (2011) sentiment, stating that, "…if the commercialisation, commodification and militarisation of the university continues unabated, higher education will become yet another one of a number of institutions incapable of fostering critical inquiry, public debate, human acts of justice and common deliberation" (p.5).

The commodification of HE is further reflected in society's move towards 'consumer power' that brings an increased expectation of 'value for money', 'better service' and the 'right to complain' (Greatrix, 2010). The Office of Independent Adjudicator reports that student complaints have risen from 734 in 2007 to 1,517 in 2016, showing a gradual upward trend. The White Paper "Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice" (Department for Business, Skills and Innovation, 2016) also leads on the issue of student satisfaction as supportive evidence of the need to drive up standards across the sector: "Many students are dissatisfied with the provision they receive, with over 60% of students feeling that all or some elements of their course are worse than expected and a third of these attributing this to concerns with teaching quality" (Ibid., p.8).

2.3 Market forces and performativity

As market forces pervade the English HE sector, there is a growing concern regarding managing the system and psyche of its stakeholders. With central funding for the English HE

sector reduced and students carrying the majority of the cost of their study, recruiting and retaining students has become a financial imperative for universities. This has resulted in an unprecedented focus on ensuring students are 'satisfied' with their experience. However, as Molesworth et al. (2010) posit:

> The current worship of student satisfaction has fostered a climate in which institutions are obsessed with pleasing students and avoiding complaints, fearing that disputes with fee paying customers could lead to litigation (p.4).

The climate that Molesworth et al. (2010) describe, raises questions as to what students, parents and other benefactors can expect from their financial and emotional investment in a university degree. Becoming a graduate with a 'good' degree (i.e. an upper second or first class) is still commonly perceived as advantageous when choosing a vocation post-graduation. However, whilst this may be true, it cannot be guaranteed in the same way that universities cannot guarantee students positive academic results. Woodall et al. (2014) argue that "…students will inevitably experience both highs and lows" (p.49) during the course of their study and to manage these, they need to develop robust orientations towards learning that will help them deal with both success and failure. Duckworth and Peterson (2007) who coined the term 'grit' to mean:

> …perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Grit entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress. The gritty individual approaches achievement as a marathon; his or her advantage is stamina. Whereas disappointment or boredom signals to others that it is time to change trajectory and cut losses, the gritty individual stays the course (p.1087)

However, within transactional relationships, the need for 'effort' and 'perseverance' can become blurred, particularly when applied to the maxim 'the customer is always right'. I argue that this commercial adage cannot translate to the intricate, complex and unpredictable concept and outcome of learning. Collini (2011) summaries this concern, stating that: "…the model of the student as consumer is inimical to the purposes of education. The paradox of real learning is that you don't get what you 'want' – and you certainly can't buy it" (p.3). Collini continues by stating that the outcomes of the higher learning experience are dependent upon, and determined by, its users. Clinton (2009) asserts a similar perspective, stating that "Students do not simply 'purchase' degrees, as they might regular products, but are required to meet certain levels of attainment in order to be awarded a degree, they are not 'customers' in the traditional sense" (p.3).

In order to attract high quality students, universities have had to sell gold standard expectations of student experience, with promises (among others) of: "…high quality staff/lectures; good student union; cheap shop/bar/amenities and good sports facilities" (criteria of the Times Higher Education Student Experience Survey, 2017). Traditional business concepts of 'supply and demand' have thus become prevailing features of the commercialised world within which universities now operate. Student (and parent) expectations of personalised support, successful study outcomes and employability guarantees have raised significant concerns regarding the negative impact such a culture will have upon the core mission of HE (Kandiko, 2013). Furedi, (2011) argues this point:

> As always the commercialisation of education encourages institutions to provide what customers want rather than what they need to become truly educated…Since, according to the logic of marketisation, the customer is always right, the university had better listen to the student (p.4).

From my professional experience, the concept of 'value for money' within the undergraduate student population can manifest itself by an increased demand for: contact with staff through teaching; personal tutoring and online dialogue; assessment guidance and support; opportunities for personalised provision and support for resolving issues (academic and personal). Pithers and Holland's (2007) research concurs with this observation, stating that students judge the effectiveness of their university on a number of different factors including:

> …effective communication skill; organising and structuring subject-matter content that is of merit; generating and maintaining interest; resolving issues concerned with assessment such as criteria; grading, fairness and the provision of feedback as well as to a lesser degree giving clear instructions and being friendly and approachable (p.8).

Such performative pressures are being widely felt across the sector. Through increased managerialism, institutions and their staff are required to respond to a growing number of internal and external targets, benchmarks and key performance indicators. Ball (2003) defines performativity as:

> …a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change – based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic) (p.216).

MacFarlane (2015) asserts that student performativity is focused around three key aspects i.e.:

- Presenteeism: removes the right of students to be treated as adults and exercise free choice retarding their opportunity to develop this capacity in the process.

- Learnerism: subjects students to participative pressures turning university study as a private space into a mode of observable public performance.

- Soulcraft: demands an oral and textual enactment of the private and personal, domesticating rather than empowering students as free and independent thinkers.

In a later piece of research, MacFarlane (2016) concludes that student performativity frames much of HE assessment policy and practice. He cites the monitoring of attendance as a key example of how a student's choice is eroded and continues to argue that:

> …assessment practices increasingly evaluate social and behavioural skills in a public learning space rather than individual intellectual understanding in a largely private one. Despite the purported benefits for student learning this performative turn is a cause for concern in undermining their freedom to make choices as learners and rewards game playing behaviours (p.851).

This has particular relevance to the research area being explored, as AFTs are voluntary within the UoB support infra-structure. Thus, students' decision as to whether they attend an AFT is – at policy-level at least – understood to be a matter of individual choice.

The following section presents an overview of NSS data relating to students' satisfaction with their experiences of assessment and feedback within their courses.

2.4 Overview of National Student Survey (NSS) relating to assessment and feedback

Across all discipline areas, in almost all HE institutions, the NSS outcomes (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2016) indicate that students are less satisfied with their assessment and feedback experience than with other pedagogic aspects of their course. In 2016, the areas of assessment and feedback, recorded 74% as the proportion of satisfied students on taught courses in English teaching institutions (Ibid.). With the exception of categories relating to 'organisation and management' and to 'student union', assessment and feedback continues to buck the statistical trend set by the other areas which consistently score in the '80 – 90' bracket (see list below).

- Overall satisfaction: 85%
- The teaching on my course: 87%

- Learning resources: 86%

- Academic support: 82%

- Personal development: 82%

- Organisation and management: 79%

- Assessment and feedback: 74%

- Student Union: 68%

(National Student Survey results in English teaching institutions, Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2016).

I acknowledge Ramsden et al.'s (2010) concern that there needs to be caution when making direct comparison between different categories of the NSS. I concur with this view, as the intense and emotive responses often associated with assessment and feedback may not be as apparent or significant in, for example, the category of personal development.

With regards to questions relating to assessment and feedback, undergraduate students are currently asked to report on their satisfaction levels on a six point Likert scale (i.e. definitely agree, mostly agree, neither agree nor disagree, mostly disagree, definitely disagree and not applicable). Students who respond to a question with 'Neither agree nor disagree', will be treated as neutral, and will not contribute towards the totals for positive or negative responses. Respondents are asked to score their assessment and feedback experiences against five questions (numbered 5 – 9 on the NSS) shown in the table below. It illustrates assessment and feedback satisfaction scores, from English full-time students studying on taught undergraduate degrees. The final column shows the average score for each question. The data captures the period 2010-2016.

Question number	Assessment and feedback	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Average
5	The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance.	70	72	74	75	76	77	77	74
6	Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair.	72	73	75	76	76	77	77	75
7	Feedback on my work has been prompt.	59	62	65	68	69	70	71	65.5
8	I have received detailed comments on my work.	63	66	68	70	71	72	72	69
9	Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand.	57	60	63	65	66	68	68	63

Table 1: NSS Assessment and feedback results in English teaching institutions from 2010-2016 (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2016)

Although this is a relatively simplistic representation of what is clearly a complex and incomplete picture, the quantitative data shows some interesting trends including:

- Gradual improvement in all five key areas of assessment and feedback, with progress slowing around 2013 (this is as expected due to the scope for improvement being reduced as the percentage becomes higher).
- The three questions relating specifically to 'feedback' (i.e. questions 7, 8 and 9) consistently score the lowest in the category.

- Question 9 (i.e. "Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand"), has the lowest average overall score, not achieving a satisfaction score above 67%. It also has the lowest score in the data set (i.e. 57%).

The literature adds critical insight into these scores, with research converging around key issues of students' experiences of assessment and feedback that include tutors' comments being: unclear and difficult to interpret and therefore challenging to implement; too generalised and vague, rather than specific and personalised; too negative and therefore demotivating; returned to students too late thus rendering them less useful in progressing learning (Boud, 2009; Carless, 2015; Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick 2006; Sambell, 2016). These issues will be explored in more detail within the following literature chapter.

However, whilst the area of assessment and feedback has never – since the first NSS publication in 2005 – scored higher than 74% it nevertheless suggests that nearly three quarters of the student population 'mostly' or 'definitely' agree with the five NSS questions. This implies that the student body is largely satisfied with this area of their study. However, the fact remains that satisfaction with assessment and feedback consistently receives the lowest score on the NSS. Thus, research needs to be directed to understanding why this is the case and how it can be improved.

Despite a high degree of importance being placed on the results of the NSS, there has been a significant number of arguments posited about its flawed nature and the negative impact it may be having on the sector's reputation. Callender et al. (2014) refer to the "...alleged manipulation of results by some HE institutions and concerns that the NSS created perverse incentives for HE institutions to manipulate students' responses, on the basis that poor overall scores would devalue their degrees" (p.18). Indeed, calls for the boycott of the NSS grow as:

> …its continued status and centrality will mean a market with increased and variable fees; staff and institutions forced to compete in metrics based on the government's right-wing understanding of education; and public universities pushed to collapse while private businesses are given help to take their place (National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, 2016, n.p.)

Pedagogic criticisms have been raised by the Re-engineering Assessment Practices in Higher Education group (REAP, 2017) regarding how NSS questions reinforce students' perspectives that feedback on assessed work is a uni-directional and tutor-centric process. The REAP

group's position is understandable, in that the questions posed in the NSS neither prompt students to reflect upon their role with the feedback cycle, nor do they elicit responses that help students make connections between feedback and deep learning that has occurred cumulatively over a period of time (i.e. the role and place of formative feedback).

Humphries-Smith and Hunt (2015) add there is much confusion from both staff and students as to what constitutes 'feedback', stating that it is "…often viewed as being on student work that has been completed and not seen relationally to the future and that students' find it difficult to see feedback as useful to the whole course experience and not just a specific unit or assignment" (p.2). Adding further weight to the criticisms of the NSS questions, Price et al. (2010) posit that there is little agreement within the sector as to what high quality feedback is. They assert that it, "…can only be effective when the learner understands the feedback and is willing and able to act on it" (p.279). However, due to the quantitative design of the NSS, it is impossible to gain deeper understanding of the degree to which students are engaging with, and acting upon, the advice and guidance of their tutors.

2.5 The drive to improve undergraduate students' experiences of assessment feedback

Universities' concern for students' experience of feedback has become central to the task of improving the student experience as a whole (Price et al. 2010; Orsmond and Merry 2015). Within the literature there is growing evidence to support the argument that students should become more centrally involved within the assessment and feedback process (Boud et al. 2010; Evans and Waring, 2011, Gibbs and Simpson, 2005). On a national level, the UK's Quality Code for Higher Education (The Quality Assurance Agency, 2015) cites a key premise for effective assessment as enabling and promoting dialogue about, and reflective use of, feedback. The National Union of Students (NUS) published a report that revealed a continuing shift in student expectations of feedback:

> When looking at the types of assessment feedback students are receiving on their work, students are continuing to request more verbal feedback from their tutors or an independent academic. Currently 42.3% of students said that they received verbal feedback from the tutor who set the work, compared to 66.1% who said that they would like the opportunity to do this. 39.3% of students said that they received written feedback on their exams but over half of students said that they would like individual meetings with their tutors, compared to 15.1% who currently do. Most students said that they had the opportunity to receive informal feedback, although 21.6% said that they never received any formative feedback (NUS, 2012, p.5).

The outcome of the above research highlights students' desire for more verbal, personalised formative feedback conducted within a context of individual tutorials with their tutors. Verbal feedback, often referred to as 'dialogic feedback' (DF) in the literature, can be defined as "…a system of guidance that provides not only a summative judgement of performance, but support through opportunities for a discussion which identifies areas of improvement and scaffolds the student to help achieve higher grades" (Beaumont et al., 2011, p.674).

The findings from the NUS (2012) research closely reflect those found in an unpublished student feedback project conducted by the Student Union within my own institution (i.e. 'I love my Education, UoB Student Union, 2014). In this questionnaire, over 1,400 undergraduate students were surveyed and the results concluded that there was general dissatisfaction with the process and quality of assessment and feedback. In support of the literature, the report suggests that students would value greater personalisation; more direct contact with tutors; improved feelings of belonging and increased opportunities for one to one support. Specifically, the findings highlighted that feedback was too often:

- presented in a written style and format that made it difficult for students to access and/or understand
- comprised of generalised comments that prevented students from gaining a clear understanding of what they need to do specifically to improve
- lacking in personal contact with tutors, resulting in students 'feeling lost' and unsure of what best to do next
- 'one-way' and 'tutor-centric' not offering students the opportunity to discuss or question the feedback they had been given.

In response to these findings – as well as outcomes from other feedback mechanisms regarding students' experience of feedback as discussed – the UoB has ensured that assessment feedback has an increased visibility and status within the institution's policy and processual framework. A selection of these policies and guidance will be discussed in the following section.

2.6 Undergraduate assessment and feedback policy within the University of Brighton

The UoB's Student Charter (University of Brighton, 2015) explains the relationship between the university, the students and Students' Union. Relevant to this research, the Charter states a commitment to ensuring the highest quality assessment and feedback experience by:

- providing access to personal tutors and appropriate study support
- ensuring appropriate and timely feedback on all coursework.

A number of core policies and strategies support this commitment to the student body. For example, within the University's 'Learning and Teaching Strategy (2012-15): Setting the Agenda for 2020', key pedagogic principles are outlined for all undergraduate courses:

- Making assessment explicit.
- Face-to-face engagement will be of the highest importance and teaching and learning will be primarily interactive.
- Students will be part of learning communities in which they will interact directly with academic staff.
- Students will be encouraged and empowered to be more involved in the ownership of their own learning.

(University of Brighton, 2012, pp.3-4)

In support of these core missions, a key strategy to support students' engaging in their feedback can be found in the Personal Academic Tutoring Policy (2017) which assures undergraduate students that they will have "…regular opportunities to review the academic, personal wellbeing and employability aspects of their development as they progress through their course (p.1). This reflects the more recent release of the NUS Charter on Personal tutoring (2015) which states that all students should be entitled to a named personal tutor.

The NUS Charter (2015. p.2) goes on to outline the following points:
1. All students should be entitled to a named personal tutor.
2. All students should meet their tutor at least once a term.
3. Staff should be given full training on being an effective personal tutor.

4. There should be institution-wide procedures for personal tutoring.
5. Staff and students should set mutual expectations.
6. The personal tutoring system should be adaptable to students' needs.
7. Personal tutoring should support both academic and personal development.
8. Understanding assessment feedback should be integrated into personal tutoring.
9. Personal tutoring should be recognised in staff reward and recognition schemes.
10. Personal tutoring should make full use of appropriate new technologies.

Significant to the focus of this research is Point 8, i.e. 'Understanding assessment feedback should be integrated into personal tutoring'. However, within the School of Education (UoB), there are a number of critical differences between a personal and assessment feedback tutorial (AFT). For example, an AFT is an informal, voluntary arrangement between student and marking tutor, whereas a personal tutorial is structured within the students' timetable. Further, an AFT is most likely to be conducted by the module/marking tutor, whereas a personal tutor may not be directly related to the marking of a student's module.

More specific assessment and feedback policy and practice is published within the University's General Examination and Assessment Regulations (GEAR) 2015-16, (University of Brighton, GEAR, Section J: Assessment Policy). Within GEAR, feedback is expected to "…seek to support learning and facilitate improvement" (p.129). A common framework for the student experience of assessment details specific expectations regarding assessment feedback, including that students should:

- be provided with clear, accessible information on when (i.e. timeliness) and how (i.e. the nature and extent) feedback on the assessment task, including coursework and examinations, will be provided to students. This should be guided by the following principles to ensure that feedback is an effective and integral part of the learning process
- have coursework marked and returned to students as quickly as possible after internal moderation so that feedback is of formative value to students and has a feed-forward function. Where possible feedback should be available before students prepare and submit further assessments. The timeframe in which students can expect to receive feedback should be made clear, in advance, so that they know when to expect it

- be informed of the actual date for receipt of feedback. This should normally be no longer than 20 working days from the submission deadline and should be included on the assessment brief. There is no expectation that work handed in after the date set for submission will be returned within this specified time.

With regards to what students can expect in terms of quality of feedback from their tutor, GEAR states that markers' comments should be:

- legible, provided in clear accessible language and in an accessible format for the student
- related to the learning outcomes and linked explicitly to marking criteria of the assessment (i.e. task-focused), to indicate the extent to which the work has met the requirements of the assessment task. This facilitates a student's understanding of his/her achievement in the assessment
- constructive and indicate both strengths and areas for improvement which enable students to be self-reflective and take action to improve their learning.

Details of what students should do if they have difficulty understanding the feedback, should also be provided within the written commentary. The policy goes on to state that:

- the type of feedback provided will be informed by a number of factors including: the nature and purpose of the assessment activity; the discipline and when the module is taken as part of a student's programme of study
- feedback can be provided in a variety of ways, using whatever media is appropriate, including; written (which should normally be typed/word processed), electronic and oral formats, to individuals or to groups of students. The use of standard assignment feedback coversheets or pro-formas is an effective and time-efficient way to provide feedback comments.

(University of Brighton, GEAR, 2016-17)

2.7 Addendum to University of Brighton assessment feedback policy

Within the academic year (i.e. 2016-17), an important change to UoB undergraduate assessment policy was announced, which has significant implications for both the relevance and timeliness of my research. The revision relates to a scheme known as 'In-Year Module

Retrieval' (IYMR) which has been approved for introduction at the start of the academic year 2016 to first year undergraduate students (University of Brighton, IYMR, 2017). Having been trialled in a number of other UK higher education institutions (HEIs), for example Sheffield Hallam University, the IYMR scheme will allow students who fail an assessment in their first semester to opt in to an early retrieval opportunity (i.e. they can retrieve their referred module grade early in the year and not have to wait for the decision of the summer Examination Board). This new policy states that, as a means of encouraging students to engage with academic feedback and become more confident in using it to improve their work, the "…retrieval will be in the form of correcting work (or pieces of work) and not entail a full re-assessment" (University of Brighton, IYMR, 2017).

Significant to my research, is that the IYMR policy also states a requirement for each student to be offered an assessment feedback tutorial (AFT) by the marking tutor who – within a face-to-face meeting – will guide the student through key points of their feedback using a dialogic feedback approach (DF). Students' experiences of this form of DF, where the marking tutor meets to discuss with the student ways in which they can engage with assessment feedback, forms the focus of this thesis.

There are, however, a number of key differences between my research and the IYMR scheme. These include:

- The IYMR currently relates only to first year students. This research however explores second-year undergraduate students' experiences and perceptions of DF within an AFT context.
- Within the IYMR policy, attendance at the DF tutorial is strongly encouraged. However, for the participants in my research, AFTs had only been experienced as an optional learning support mechanism and one not formally integrated into the University's feedback policy.

Regardless of these relatively minor differences, I believe this positions my research in a unique and exciting place within current developments relating to DF local and national policy and practice.

2.8 Summary

This chapter captures a particular point in time, when the ongoing neo-liberalisation of the sector continues to exert significant economic pressure upon universities, forcing cost-cutting whilst, at the same time, increasing expectation of revenue return. Through increasing performative measurements and outputs, dominant discourses of student satisfaction underpin the sector. Against this context, assessment feedback – and undergraduates' experiences of it – has come under increasing scrutiny by those managing universities. Within this policy context, it has been shown that DF is perceived as a highly valuable mode of feedback by students (Bloxham and Campbell, 2010; Evans, 2013) yet one that is not standard practice within universities. Acknowledging both the practical issues and resource investment that DF demands, a key question remains, i.e. when DF is offered to students, why is the opportunity not always taken-up? As Williams and Smith (2016) reported from their research:

> Nearly a third of the students surveyed responded that they had never, by mid-way in their second year, followed up essay feedback by discussing it with their lecturer or seminar tutor. More than 40 per cent had only done this once or twice; but it was only routine ('most of the time' or 'always') for five of the survey respondents. This is despite the seminar tutor and module convenor of the students surveyed having made repeated invitations to students, having an open-door policy, always keeping office hours, and frequently meeting with students outside of office hours (Williams and Smith, n.p.)

The following chapter will offer detailed theoretical discussion of aspects of assessment feedback in undergraduate learning. Specifically, conceptualisations of dialogic feedback will be explored and reflected upon in light of the aim of the research.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

From the political backdrop framing undergraduate student experiences and expectations of assessment and feedback, this chapter turns attention to theoretical discussions pertaining to the phenomenon of DF. In doing so, it seeks to address broad areas of academic debate, within the extant literature, that relate to the research aim and questions. The chapter is sub-divided into five sections as follows.

Section 1: A shift towards student-centred learning in higher education

Section 2: Learner autonomy in Higher Education

Section 3: Assessment and feedback in Higher Education

Section 4: Dialogic feedback

Section 5: The student self

As these areas do not exist in isolation from each other, I have designed the literature chapter around a 'funnelling' approach, introducing foundational constructs at the start of the discussion (e.g. student-centred learning, autonomy, assessment and feedback) before focusing upon the topic under investigation, namely DF. It is intended that such a structure will build a cumulative, rich picture of the theoretical construct of DF and its complex and multifaceted nature. I acknowledge that, within an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis approach, theory is not used to lead the direction of the research, rather, it helps the researcher to be informed of the life-worlds of its participants and the phenomenon under investigation. Thus, as all the research participants were undergraduate students studying on a full-time degree course, I have framed the review of literature to focus upon learning experiences particular to this level of study.

Section 1: A shift towards student-centred learning in higher education

3.2 Introduction

The UoB Learning and Teaching strategy (2012-2015), published during the period of this study, asserted that there would be a shift away from tutor-centric learning towards more student-centred-learning (SCL). Within the strategy it was stated: "There will be a structured move towards defining our pedagogy in terms of the processes of student learning rather than by the detail of teaching inputs. Face-to-face engagement will be of the highest importance and will be primarily interactive" (p.3). A key outcome of this movement towards SCL is a focus on more student-centred feedback practices, including DF. This opening section will explore understandings around SCL through a number of theoretical perspectives including sociocultural theory, partnerships in learning and participatory learning.

3.21 Student-centred learning

Dear (2017) observes that "Student-centred learning is an approach to education that has become endemic across all levels of education over the past decades" (p.719). Rust (2002) describes the paradigm shift towards student-centred learning to include: "…a greater emphasis on the development of skills, and in particular, general transferable 'life' skills (and the notion of lifelong learning), and the writing of course units and modules in terms of intended student-learning outcomes (p.146). Within this paradigm shift, learning is perceived as moving away from traditional, behaviourist models of tutor-centric teaching and assessment, towards more student focused approaches. It reflects contemporary notions of HE learning which is "… more often than not, a synthesis of ideas from constructivist, socio-cognitive and situated perspectives, where learning is regarded as a process whereby individuals construct knowledge and understandings as they interact with the social environment" (Hawe and Dixon, 2016, p.1).

Proponents of the approach argue that a core objective of SCL is to support students in developing "…an independent, lifelong approach to learning, that requires the student to fully invest in the learning process, and take ownership of their learning and development (Winstone and Milward, 2012, p.1). Cannon and Newble (2000) provide a broad definition of SCL as:

> …ways of thinking and learning that emphasise student responsibility and activity
> in learning rather than what the teachers are doing. Essentially SCL has student
> responsibility and activity at its heart, in contrast to a strong emphasis on teacher

control and coverage of academic content in much conventional, didactic teaching (p.16)

As a means of meeting this principled aim, SCL associates with pedagogic approaches that intentionally seek to develop an individual's sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994). Here, self-efficacy is understood as "…people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave" (Bandura, 1994, p.71). MacHemer and Crawford (2007) argue that in order for students to experience ownership of their learning they must be placed at the heart of it, through active participation, decision-making and dialogue with others.

Lea et al. (2003, p.332) detail further the key features of SCL, stating that it includes:

- the reliance on active rather than passive learning
- an emphasis on deep learning and understanding
- increased responsibility and accountability on the part of the student
- an increased sense of autonomy in the learner
- an interdependence between teacher and learner
- mutual respect within the learner teacher relationship
- a reflexive approach to the teaching and learning process on the part of both teacher and learner.

These intentions broadly reflect those cited by Knowles (1980), whose seminal writing on adult learning theory (or androgogy) highlighted similar expectations. Within his androgogic conception, Knowles (Ibid.) stressed the independence of the adult learner and the value of the experience they bring to the learning situation. Further, he asserted that the adult learner is intrinsically motivated to learn and keen to apply their knowledge to more problem-solving teaching and learning approaches (Knowles, 1980, p. 43). He asserted that within the adult learning environment, individuals should feel "…accepted, respected and supported" (Ibid., p.47) through a tutor/learner relationship based on "a spirit of mutuality" (Ibid.). Knowles' (1980) "spirit of mutuality" (p.47) is reflected within an epistemological assumption that "…knowledge is not mechanically acquired, but actively constructed within the constraints and offerings of the learning environment" (Lui and Matthews, 2005, p.388). Thus, within such a conception, learning is perceived as, "…a predominately semiotic process, where participation in socially mediated activities is essential" (Turuk, 2008, p.244). This perspective of learning

aligns to sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) which, as stated earlier, acts to theoretically frame SCL and DF.

3.22 Sociocultural theory

Both SCL and DF are reliant upon the use of dialogue between student and tutor, as a means of constructing knowledge through learner engagement and empowerment. Hence, both SCL and DF reflect the fundamental premise of sociocultural theory, where learning is experienced through language and interaction with the social environment (Vygotsky, 1978). From this social interaction, Vygotsky (1978) believed cognition was developed at two levels: the first through interaction with others, and the second via the integration into the individual's mental structure.

> Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals (p.29).

A key element of sociocultural theory is the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, attributed to Vygotsky (1978), which he described as:

> …the distance between the actual developmental level, as determined by independent problem solving, and the level of potential development, as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (p.34).

The 'adult guidance' described, plays a prominent role in sociocultural theory and practice and has become known as 'scaffolding'. Wood et al. (1976) explain that the sensitive process of scaffolding: "…enables a novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts… thus permitting him to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his range of competence" (p.90). Within the practice of scaffolding the tutor acts as a guide or facilitator of learning and, through subtle interjections, prompts the students into new ways of thinking. Hence, the role of the tutor is not, as has been levied by critics of more cognitivist approaches to learning, an authoritarian adult whose task it is to transmit knowledge to the student through didactic means. Such a 'teacher-telling' approach is the antithesis of SCL and DF, where both dialogue and social-interaction are necessary for the student to engage in the process of meaning-making and

knowledge construction. This fundamental theoretical argument, that learning occurs in and through partnership, forms the philosophical basis upon which SCL has been established.

3.23 Partnerships in learning

In adopting an SCL approach, both the tutor and student need frequent and ongoing opportunities to learn alongside one another (Dunne et. al., 2007). Similarly, in DF, the tutor and student engage in interactive, communicative acts (e.g. talking, listening and thinking) requiring a respectful and trusting partnership. An essential feature of a student-tutor partnership is that both parties feel they play an equal and important role. This is most effective when there is active student engagement and not a dominance of the tutor's authority or presence. Here, student engagement is taken to mean:

> …the interaction between the time, effort and other relevant resources invested by both students and their institutions intended to optimise the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students and the performance, and reputation of the institution (Trowler, 2010, p.2).

Capturing this argument, I draw upon Healey et al.'s (2014) model of students as partners.

Fig. 1: Students as partners in learning and teaching in HE (HEA 2015, adapted from Healey et al., 2014. Reproduced with permission from the HEA.)

Healey et al. (2014) assert that, for students to perceive themselves as partners in their learning, they need to be fully engaged in it. Thus, the model is encircled and underpinned by the notion of student engagement:

> Partnership is framed as a process of student engagement, understood as staff and students learning and working together to foster engaged student learning and engaging learning and teaching enhancement. In this sense partnership is a relationship in which all participants are actively engaged in and stand to gain from the process of learning and working together (Ibid., p.7).

At the heart of the model is the notion of partnership learning communities, which are framed by four overlapping processes through which partnership operates i.e.

- learning, teaching and assessment
- subject-based research and inquiry
- curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy
- scholarship of teaching and learning.

These four processes do not exist in isolation. Indeed, Healey et al. (2014) assert that they merge and overlap (represented as two key points of intersect on the diagram i.e. 'learning, designing and developing' and 'researching and inquiring'). These intersecting points form complex spaces where new partnership learning opportunities can arise. Healey et al. (2014) state that – through partnership relationships – issues of power and identity can be addressed, giving rise to positive learning orientation and attributes. These are shown on the diagram as: responsibility; authenticity; honesty; inclusivity; reciprocity; empowerment; trust; courage and plurality.

In terms of DF, the model offers a useful lens through which the phenomenon can be understood as a partnership learning experience. Perceived in this way, DF could be viewed not merely as a space and place to address academic feedback but also an opportunity to help the student to feel empowered in their learning. This could be achieved through the student having greater voice in the design, implementation and/or delivery of the assessment and feedback process. Within the AFT itself, students could be invited to set the tutorial agenda, or lead their tutor through examples of how they have addressed the feedback. Such practices

would reaffirm the essential viewpoint within the model, that partnership is understood as "…a way of doing things, rather than an outcome in itself" (Healey et al., 2014, p.9).

3.24 Participatory learning

Building upon the concept of partnership is the notion of participation and participatory learning. Fay (1988) argues that participatory learning is "…a concentration of the ideas of humanist philosophy and psychology which recognises the integrity and freedom of the individual and attempts to convert the teaching/learning process accordingly" (p.8). Supported by key humanist philosophers such as Carl Rogers and John Dewey, participatory learning has become synonymous with discourses of student engagement and active learning. Coates (2005) encapsulates key features of participatory learning, stating that it is:

> …based on the constructivist assumption that learning is influenced by how an individual participates in educationally purposeful activities. Learning is seen as a 'joint proposition' which also depends on institutions and staff providing students with the conditions, opportunities and expectations to become involved. However, individual learners are ultimately the agents in discussions of engagement (p.26).

Within any dialogic exchange (be it in a classroom learning context or AFT), students need to be active participants central to the process of knowledge construction. Thus, participation should be a negotiated and shared process between the student and tutor, balancing both the support a student receives and the challenges that they experience. Hence, dialogue is a participatory model of learning and feedback, within which mutual relationships can be forged. From this proposition, SCL pedagogy and DF sit together in direct opposition to traditional, hierarchical models of didactic, tutor-centric teaching and assessment, where the learner is a passive recipient of the tutor's knowledge. Sfard (1998) clarifies the differences between these two opposing perspectives, suggesting two metaphors of learning: i.e. acquisition and participation. These are summarised in the table below (Coffield, 2008).

Aspect	Acquisition	Participation
Goal	Individual enrichment	Community building
Learning	Acquiring facts and skills	Becoming a participant
Student	Recipient, customer	Apprentice, peripheral participation

Teacher	Deliverer, provider	Expert, dialogue partner
Knowledge	Possession, commodity	Aspect of practice
Knowing	Having, possessing	Belonging, participating

Table 2: Two metaphors of learning (Coffield, 2008 adapted from Sfard, 1998)

Coffield (2008) explains that within participatory modes of learning, the process is seen not in terms of knowledge delivery or acquisition (i.e. traditional cognitivist models), but rather as induction, where students enter the learning community as apprentices. Through increased participation and familiarisation with the community, students become more central to its construction and future, impacting upon the way it functions and evolves.

3.25 Criticisms of student-centred learning

Although SCL has emerged as a dominant discourse of learning in English HE, it is not without criticism. Cunningham (2009) argues that in a sector dominated by performativity and testing "It is much easier to justify direct academic instruction in the skills and content that are measured on standardised tests" (p.48). Farrington (1991) concluded from an extensive research project observing classroom practice, that there is frequently "…more rhetoric than reality involved in claims about student-centred learning methods" (p.16), while many educators believed that they were adopting a student-centred approach, the learning–teaching agenda remained firmly in the hands of the teacher. Lea et al.'s (2003) study of student perspectives of SCL, concluded some participants "…were cynical about student-centred learning initiatives, believing them to be driven by a political agenda (such as the pressures associated with staff research) rather than by a genuine commitment to improving learning and teaching" (p. 321). Geelan (2001) cautions that, in order to mitigate the potential resistance to SCL approaches, "…a teacher's withdrawal from an intensive, controlling classroom role must be negotiated with students in ways that avoid the creation of an 'empty centre'" (p.1). Finally, within the new era of private universities, the UK based BPP University (named after its three founders Brierley, Price and Prior), is the first HE institution to explicitly reject teaching and learning methods associated with SCL. On its Post-Graduate web-site (accessed July 2017) for new students, it states:

- You will be introduced to high-quality empirical research into effective teaching methods, and the latest insights from cognitive science about how the human mind works. All research covered by this programme will be directly applicable to your classroom practice.
- You will review the evidence calling into question popular but unproductive teaching methods such as discovery-based learning, minimal teacher guidance, and the tailoring of lessons to pupils' individual learning styles.

Having outlined some key theoretical influences upon SCL and DF practice, I now turn my attention to literature that explores learner autonomy and independence.

Section 2: Learner Autonomy in Higher Education

3.3 Introduction

As established, SCL is a pedagogic approach which affords students an opportunity to take greater ownership, responsibility and accountability for their learning. These central features of SCL are critical in realising its primary aim of reducing the influence of the tutor, whilst empowering students to become more autonomous/independent. Thus, DF is closely aligned to the pedagogic rationale of SCL, whilst proponents of DF also claim learner autonomy/independence as being one of the critical outcomes of this mode of feedback (Carless, 2016; Sambell, 2016; Nicol at al.; 2014). The following section will explore literature surrounding the concept of autonomy/independence, which will later be referred to in discussion regarding the nature and purpose of DF. This section will commence by exploring some definitions of the concept of autonomy and self-regulated learning and progress to critically examine issues of student power and agency within the student/tutor relationship.

3.31 Autonomy: Towards a definition of learner independence

Defining autonomy is not a simple task. A key challenge in defining the term is the vast number of associated and/or alternative terms that exist within the literature relating to autonomy. These include: independent learning; auto-didaxy; self-instruction; distance learning, direct independent learning and self-direction, to name but a few. It appears that some of these terms can be used interchangeably whilst others are quite distinct e.g. 'distance learning' which commonly has less face-to-face interaction and requires a significant degree of technology in order to sustain it (Benson, 1997). Finch (2002) observes, "…the general agreement on the value of autonomy in education has often hidden the fact that there is little consensus as to its definition" (p.15). In support of this, Gill and Halim (2007) raise the concern that:

> While many are eager to jump on the bandwagon of independent learning, there is insufficient consensus or defining parameters to illuminate what independent learning is, what the desired goals are and how it impacts on stakeholders (p.1).

For clarity, the terms autonomy and independence will be used inter-changeably within this research, as much of the literature assumes this to be the case (Meyer et al., 2008; Benson, 1997). Further, from a practice-based perspective, these terms are often used synonymously

both in policy and pedagogy. In my experience however, 'independence' and 'independent learning' appear to be used in preference.

In this research, independence is understood as, "…a means that one can and does set one's own rules, and can choose for oneself the norms one will respect. In other words, autonomy refers to one's ability to choose what has value, that is to say, to make choices in harmony with self-realisation" (Chene, 1983, p.39). Further, an independent learner is able to integrate "…whatever he or she learns in the formal context of the classroom with what he or she has already become, as a result of developmental and experiential learning" (Little, 1995, p.175). An independent learner may choose to work alongside a peer, within a small group or under the guidance of a tutor if s/he desires and understands (with clarity) the reason for doing so (Pemberton et al. 1996). Critically, the learner should be making decisions under his/her own free will and have the opportunity to exercise a degree of choice whilst doing so (Candy, 1991). However, as discussed within the context of sociocultural theory, this does not exclude the role of the tutor. This is particularly relevant for DF, as it assumes a key role for the tutor in both creating and discussing the summative written feedback that forms the focus for the AFT.

Building on the above definitions of what independent learning is, Esch (1996) outlines what it is not: "First it is not self-instruction or learning without a teacher. Secondly, it does not mean that intervention or initiative on the part of a teacher is banned. Thirdly, it is not something teachers do to learners i.e. a new methodology. Fourthly, it is not a single easily identifiable behaviour. Finally, it is not a steady state achieved by learners once and for all" (p.37). Benson (1997) adds to the final point, asserting that there are 'degrees of autonomy' where the behaviour of learners can take numerous different forms depending on their age, level of progress and motivation. Perceiving such a flexible continuum is a useful concept and could inform ways in which practitioners ascertain the various levels of responsibility placed on students at different stages within their study. Additionally, by perceiving learners' autonomy as transient allows us greater insight into student needs and what intrinsically motivates them (Deci and Ryan, 1985; 2008). These considerations recognise the complex, individual and dynamic nature of learning (Deci and Ryan 1985) and support Little's (1995) conclusion that "…rarely, if ever, is autonomy realised in its 'ideal' state" (p.175).

3.32 Self-directed learning

Building upon the previous discussion of independent learning, this section examines self-directed learning, identified in the literature as a key outcome of DF, with proponents claiming that:

> One way of increasing the effectiveness of external feedback and the likelihood that the information provided is understood by students is to conceptualise feedback more as *dialogue* rather than as information transmission. Feedback as dialogue means that the student not only receives initial feedback information but also has the opportunity to engage the teacher in discussion about that feedback (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006, p.11).

Holec (1988) describes self-directed learning as happening once autonomy has been acquired and the student is sufficiently confident to make decisions regarding their direction of learning. Zimmerman (2002) frames self-directed learning around a number of key learner characteristics, stating that such students are defined by:

> …not their reliance on socially isolated methods of learning, but rather their personal initiative, perseverance, and adoptive skill. Self-regulated students focus on how they activate, alter, and sustain specific learning practices in social as well as solitary contexts (p.70).

Kuh (2009) concurs with this perspective of self-directed learning, stating that a number of qualities help the learner to make right learning choices. These qualities include: personal confidence; self-motivation; taking initiative and accepting responsibility. However, many students entering HE will face unfamiliar – and unrealistic – demands to work more independently as they have not acquired the necessary skills, nor the qualities outlined, to become self-directed learners. Indeed, students entering university straight from compulsory education may have a high degree of teacher dependency, having experienced learning through close teacher instruction (Ramsden, 2010). Similarly, returning students who have been out of education for some time may struggle to become re-acquainted with the languages, practices and conventions associated with formal learning and thus may need more support (Hassanien and Barber, 2007.) Therefore, a fundamental task of universities is to create meaningful, socially-centred, transition programmes that support the inculcation of students into university level learning and the gradual movement from dependency to independency (Holec, 1988).

As a means of supporting students in becoming more self-directing, Holec (1988) argues that they may first need to go through a process of 'de-conditioning'. This, Finch (2002) asserts, aims to free the learner from constraining ideas such as: a) one method of learning is superior to other approaches; b) the tutor is in possession of this said method; c) experience gained as a learner of other subjects cannot be transferred and that d) s/he is incapable of making any valid assessment of performance. Crome et al. (2009) support this notion, arguing that from being de-conditioned, students can be supported in developing a self-regulatory: "…habit of mind, expressed through a range of activities and skills, acquired and developed through practice" (p.6).

Savin-Baden (2008) concurs with this notion of 'habits of mind', stating that learning is located within the identities of the learner. She states that learners adopt 'learning stances', which can be understood as "…an attitude, belief or disposition towards a particular context, person or experience. It refers to a particular position one takes up in life towards something, at a particular point in time" (p.56). Savin-Baden (Ibid.) offers three broad stances:

- Personal stance: the way in which staff and students see themselves in relation to the learning context and give their own distinctive meaning to their experience of that context.
- Pedagogical stance: the ways in which people see themselves as learners in particular educational environments.
- Interactional stance: the ways in which learners work and learn in groups and construct meaning in relation to one another.

Thus, the learning stance is flexible and responsive to the immediate environment and space within which the learner finds themselves. Savin-Baden (2008) points out, however, that learners may experience certain situations where:

> …conflict between expectation, identity and belief in a learning context can result in staff and students becoming stuck: experiencing disjunction in learning and in teaching, either personally, pedagogically or interactionally (p.102).

Cotterall (1995) suggests that self-regulation is effective in promoting deeper learning for two principal reasons. First, it offers students the opportunity to learn through reflective experiences and thus engages them in the realities of the social world around them. Second, it encourages students to develop the necessary learning orientations and motivations to become self-

directing. However, this does not mean that it exists without contention. Knights and Willmott (2002) state that although autonomy appears to be something of an "unalloyed virtue" (p.60) we should be attentive to its potential "…to be dystopic in the name of self-determination" (p.61).

3.33 A question of agency and power

Throughout this review of literature, the importance of communication between tutors and students (as well as amongst peers) has been reinforced as the pivotal loci upon which sociocultural learning theories - and their associated pedagogies of SCL and DF – depend. However, Higgins et al. (2001) raise a critical point that:

> …the process of feedback as communication is inherently problematic. The 'internal' dynamics of feedback as communication must be fore-grounded in any attempt to further our understanding of assessment feedback… In other words, it is impossible to investigate how an outside influence impacts upon a process if the internal dynamics of that process are not understood – that is, if the true nature of the process remains hidden (or simply assumed) (p.232).

Here, I interpret Higgins et al.'s (2001) reference to the 'internal' dynamics of communication to include issues of relational power and student agency. In HE, unequal power relationships are evidenced both within the hierarchical relations between students and their tutors and the power relations which exists between the students themselves. Within the context of DF, I argue the existence of asymmetric power relations is inevitable, due to the tutor taking on the role of marker and moderator, traditionally without negotiation or reference to the students' opinion. Thus, within the context of DF, the degree of student agency is limited.

As a means of explaining how power and agency are understood within the context of this research, I concur with the theoretical viewpoint that agency in learning is viewed as "…both dependent on social structures and on personal powers … mediated through activity that occurs over time, namely the exercise of powers of reflexive deliberation and the occurrence of social interaction" (Kahn et al., 2012, p.868). Archer (2007) separates structure and culture, rather than viewing them as one and the same thing. Case (2015) explains the difference between structure and culture:

> Structure has to do with material goods (unequally distributed across society) and is also the domain of social positions and roles. Culture is the world of ideas and beliefs,

and includes both the worlds of propositional knowledge (in which two ideas can be put in a logical relation with each other), including science and engineering science, and the world of myths, opinions and beliefs (p.843).

Thus, learning situations are shaped independently by structural and cultural factors. The individual then draws upon their reflexive deliberations and interactions allowing them to "…subjectively determine these projects in relation to their own capacities and objective circumstances" (Kahn et al., 2012, p.868). The resulting action/interaction is understood to be the individual's agency. As a means of understanding the concept of reality, power and agency further, I introduce Bhaskar's (1978) stratified model of reality (see figure 2 below).

REAL DOMAIN
Causal structures and
generative mechanisms
with enduring properties

ACTUAL DOMAIN
Events generated by the
Real domain, may or
may not be observed

EMPIRICAL DOMAIN
Events that are actually
observed or experienced

Fig. 2 Critical realist stratified ontology adapted from Bhaskar (1978)

According to Bhaskar's theory, reality can be divided into three, overlapping domains: the Empirical, the Actual and the Real. In summary, the Real domain (shown as the outer ring in figure 2 above) "…consists of those generative mechanisms and structures that have causal powers and whose generative capacity creates the order we see in the world" (Warner, 1993, p.312). Thus, the generative mechanisms within the Real domain, produce the events or happenings that occur in the Actual domain (show, as the middle ring in figure 2 above). These events may or may not be observed by the individual. The final domain, the Empirical (shown as the central ring in figure 2 above) include those events that are directly observed and/or

experienced by the individual, through sensory information. Bhaskar (1978; 2013) represented the relationship and interaction between the three domains in the following table.

	Domain of the Real	Domain of the Actual	Domain of the Empirical
Mechanisms	✓		
Events	✓	✓	
Experiences	✓	✓	✓

Table 3. Domains of the Real, the Actual and the Empirical (Bhaskar, 1978, p.2)

Through gaining insight and understanding of the generative mechanisms within the Real domain, the question of agency and how individuals experience it, can be better understood. Reflecting upon this model within the context of this research, I argue that in relation to students' experiences of DF, issues of power and agency will be influenced by generative mechanisms within the Real domain. By identifying and understanding these mechanisms, the student experience can be better managed in the Empirical domain. Thus, I concur with Walsh and Evans (2013) who argue that:

> …the deeper layers of ontology are real because their effects are real and it is therefore incumbent on researchers to seek them out as comprehensively as possible, whilst acknowledging that they remain generative, rather than definitive mechanisms. Only then can change in effects at the empirical level be addressed effectively (p.4).

From this discussion of theories pertaining to learning in HE, learner autonomy and agency the chapter will now explore the primary research topic of assessment and feedback in HE.

Section 3: Assessment and Feedback in Higher Education

3.4 Introduction

The Quality Assurance Authority (2012), the UK's independent body entrusted with monitoring and advising on standards and quality in UK HE, describes assessment as "…any processes that appraise an individual's knowledge, understanding, abilities or skills" (p.2). However, as will be shown, I argue that such a simplified technicist definition, does not fully reflect the intense professional and academic debate currently surrounding this complex, yet critical, component of the learning process. Gaining agreement upon assessment practices that are deemed 'fit for purpose' has been highly problematic for the sector (Higher Education Academy, 2012) resulting in Knight (2002) asserting that assessment has become the English HE sector's "Achilles Heel", reflecting Mansell and James' (2009) posit that: "Perhaps no area of education policy is as contentious – or as consistently newsworthy – as assessment" (p.4).

As a means of foregrounding discussion of DF, which will be presented in more detail within Section 4, I raise here some key theories regarding assessment and feedback in HE, specifically, the concept of assessment for learning as being reflective of SCL thinking.

3.41 A shift towards assessment for learning

Within the first section of this literature review, I argued there has been a significant paradigm shift in English HE towards SCL approaches. However, I concur with Sambell's (2016) perspective that "…despite some advances in policy and practice, institutional approaches to assessment and feedback still seem to be lagging behind the curve" (p.1). This is supported by a Higher Education Authority (HEA) report that states: "…University assessment traditions have not proved easy to transform… Assessment practices in most universities have not kept pace with the vast changes in the context, aims and structure of higher education" (HEA, 2012, p.8). Mansell and James (2009) argue, however, that some subject areas/degree courses have begun to radically shift assessment and feedback practices to reflect the same ideals as SCL. Part of this rationale has arisen from criticism of the dominance of singular, high stake summative testing within the sector (Boud, 2004). Such development has been supported within the literature by several high-profile research projects, which suggest alternative approaches to effective assessment that focus upon the process rather than product of learning (e.g. Black and Wiliam, 1998, 'Inside the Black Box: Raising standards through classroom

assessment') Hence, the revised focus of assessment has been directed away from the technicalities of test construction, output and measurement (i.e. assessment *of* learning), towards approaches that attend more to the process of student learning and future progress (i.e. assessment *for* learning). Assessment for learning is taken here to mean:

> …any assessment for which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting students' learning. It thus differs from assessment designed primarily to serve the purposes of accountability, or of ranking, or of certifying competence. An assessment activity can help learning if it provides information that teachers and their students can use as feedback in assessing themselves and one another and in modifying the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. Such assessment becomes ''formative assessment'' when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching work to meet learning needs (Black et al., 2002, p.1).

Black et al.'s (2002) definition of assessment for learning stresses the central importance of the assessment being formative. In an earlier paper, Black and Wiliam (1998) offer a widely cited definition of formative assessment as: "…encompassing all those activities undertaken by teachers, and/or by their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged'' (p.7–8). Sadler (2015) asserts that formative assessment must enable students to understand the goals or standards to be achieved and their own current level of performance, and then guide them in taking action to close the gap. Juwah et al. (2004) build on this foundation, stating that formative assessment should provide students with feedback that is also 'feed-forward' i.e. solutions and ways of tackling future assessments. Yorke (2005) adds to this, stating that formative assessment can be either formal or informal and carried out by teacher or peer. The literature converges on the positive impact of assessment for learning practices, including: issues of retention (Yorke, 2005); lifelong-learning (Boud and Molloy, 2013) and attendance and participation (Dancer and Kamvounias, 2005).

Within education, summative assessments are "…used to measure what students have learnt at the end of a unit; to promote students; to ensure they have met required standards on the way to earning certification for school completion or to enter certain occupations; or as a method for selecting students for entry into further education" (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005, p.21). Thus, within the degree course in which the research participants belong, outcomes of summative assessments are realised through students gaining a percentage grade and written commentary reflecting their performance. However, stressing

this dichotomous relationship between summative and formative assessment is not always helpful as, in reality, assessment is:

> …a single process, i.e. making a judgement according to standards, goals and criteria, formative assessment is the same process as summative assessment. In addition, for an assessment to be formative, it requires feedback which indicates the existence of a 'gap' between the actual level of the work being assessed and the required standard. It also requires an indication of how the work can be improved to reach the required standard" (Taras, 2005, p.468)

I concur with the argument presented by Taras (Ibid.), adding that understanding assessment as a continuum, rather than two competing parts, can result in more holistic and balanced assessment planning. Further, as Bennett (2011) argued, it is not helpful for either summative or formative assessment to be aligned solely to assessment of learning and assessment for learning respectively as, "…assessments designed primarily to serve a summative function may also function formatively, while those designed primarily to serve a formative function may also function summatively" (p.5). Following Bennett's (Ibid.) assertion, DF could be perceived as having both summative and formative objectives in that it aims to help students understand their summative feedback and grade whilst also promoting ways of improving future academic performance.

Klenowski (2009) posits that assessment for learning is, "…part of everyday practice by students, teachers and peers that seeks, reflects upon and responds to information from dialogue, demonstration and observation in ways that enhance ongoing learning" (p.264). For assessment for learning to be successful, Rust et al. (2005) stress students need to be actively involved in all aspects of the assessment process, so that they can develop deeper understanding of the criteria and processes upon which the assessment is framed. However, as Taras (2005) reports, undergraduates are rarely given opportunities to engage with assessment and feedback processes because most assignments are distinctly separate from their control. With feedback not being used to inform learning but rather to validate judgment at the end of a module/unit, summative assessment continues to dominate practice in many universities, as does the uni-directional model of feedback (Boud and Molloy 2013). This separation of assessment from learning is not different to that which many undergraduates would have experienced during their compulsory education. However, Fazey's (1999) research raises a significant concern having found that undergraduates, at the end of their first year, felt less autonomous in their learning compared to their experience in school.

Discussion will now explore literature relating to a critical element of the assessment process i.e. feedback.

3.42 Defining assessment feedback

Within the above discussion of assessment for learning, the central importance of assessment feedback is noted particularly with reference to how it helps inform both the learner and tutor of ways to progress learning (i.e. formative). As this research focuses upon one specific mode of feedback, namely DF, the sub-section aims first to clarify some of the key theories and concepts of feedback that help to define its essential characteristics.

Falchikov (2005) asserts that assessment feedback is a dominant feature within the student experience and can determine much of the study activities they undertake, particularly in the case of the most strategic student (Knight, 1995). Feedback forms a fundamental function of HE and the way in which learning can be individually progressed:

> …as it powerfully frames how students learn and what students achieve. It is one of the most significant influences on students' experience of higher education and all that they gain from it. The reason for an explicit focus on improving assessment practice is the huge impact it has on the quality of learning (Boud at al., 2010, p.1).

Although 'assessment feedback' is a frequently used term within the teaching and learning profession, like 'assessment', there appears no single agreement as to what it means or what defines its effectiveness (Shute, 2007; Nelson and Schunn, 2009). However, there is some general agreement in the literature that assessment feedback functions as a: a) major positive/negative influence on students' learning (Sambell, 2016); b) critical element in the process of assessment and learning (Price et al.,2010) and c) bridge between what learners know and the learning outcomes of the learning task (Sadler, 2015). There is an assumption that, for assessment feedback to have any influence on learning, students must engage with it in ways that impact upon their understanding. As Orsmond et al. (2005) stated "…if information is simply stored in memory and never used, it is not feedback" (p. 381). Krause (2005) argues that for many students a disposition of "…inertia, apathy, disillusionment or engagement in other pursuits" (p.4) provides a counter-position to the sector-wide expectation that adult learners will be self-motivated to study. A significant body of research argues that students do not read their feedback (or even collect it) favouring to continue to value the 'grade' over everything else (Stothart, 2008; Wojtas, 1998). However, this only paints one side of the

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picture. Other research has demonstrated that many students regularly look beyond simply comparing marks with their peers (Robinson et al., 2011) and value the assessment feedback advice received.

The scope of feedback definitions span from utilitarian conceptions of 'reporting', that is to say, "…information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding" (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p.81) to those that position assessment feedback as a multi-dimensional and ongoing process that involves:

> …making expectations explicit and public; setting appropriate criteria and high standards for learning quality; systematically gathering, analysing and interpreting evidence to determine how well performance matches those expectations and standards; and using the resulting information to document, explain, and improve performance" (Angelo, 1995, p 7).

Shute (2007), drawing upon Black and Wiliam's research (1998), states that there are two main functions of assessment feedback: directive and facilitative.

> Directive feedback tells the student what needs to be fixed or revised. Such feedback tends to be more specific than facilitative feedback, which provides comments and suggestions to help guide students in their own revision and conceptualisation (p.6).

In my experience, designing and delivering assessment feedback requires a balance of both directive and facilitative feedback which responds to a number of factors including: students' individual needs; the purpose of the task and the particular feedback paradigm (Knight and Yorke, 2003). As Gibbs and Simpson (2005) argue, assessment feedback can be employed to:

> ...correct errors, develop understanding through explanations, generate more learning by suggesting further specific study tasks, promote the development of generic skills by focusing on evidence of the use of skills rather than on the content, promote meta-cognition by encouraging students' reflection and awareness of learning processes involved in the assignment and encourage students to continue studying" (pp. 20-21).

Boud et al. (2010) claim effective feedback should be:

- informative and supportive to encourage positivity towards learning
- timely, allowing feedback to be used to inform other learning
- frequent and specific enough to guide students' learning and work.

Price et al. (2010) identify five attributed functions of assessment feedback i.e. correction, reinforcement, forensic, diagnosis, bench-marking and longitudinal development e.g. feed-forward or feed-up. Hattie and Timperley (2007) offer a simplified model that adds details to Price's longitudinal development. They state that feedback must address three student-focused questions:

- Where am I going? (What are the goals?) known as 'feed up'.
- How am I going? (What progress is being made towards the goal?) known as 'feedback'.
- Where to next? (What activities need to be undertaken to make better progress?) known as 'feed forward'.

(Hattie and Timperley, 2007 p.86)

However, Boud and Molloy (2013) assert that the concepts outlined above, form part of a single process of high quality assessment feedback. They argue that, within feedback, there should be a noticeable effect upon the learner, as to progress their learning. As such, having separate terms – such as feed forward – is unnecessary.

> The cycle of feedback needs to be completed. If there is no discernable effect, then feedback has not occurred. This places the onus on the teacher, or the person otherwise providing information, to do what is needed to have an effect and to notice the effect. When feedback is understood in this way, feed forward is not a separate notion but a necessary characteristic of feedback (p.702).

3.43 Socio-affective dimension of students receiving assessment feedback

Our emotions play a significant role in the way we perceive learning and ourselves as learners. Critically, with regards to students receiving and accepting assessment feedback, emotions appear as a dominant factor that shape responsive behaviours. As asserted by Race (1995):

> Students' emotions greatly influence the way in which they are able to receive and process feedback, and sometimes the value of such feedback may be eclipsed by learners' reactions to it (p.67).

Värlander (2008) states that emotions are "…manifested both through an inner state of a subjective feeling, and through embodied manifestations such as increased heartbeat, tears, laughter, stomach ache, gestures, mimics etc. Following this, emotional states include both

cognitive and dispositional elements" (p.146). Such a mixture of physiological and psychological elements, influenced by an infinite number and combination of internal and external factors, make our emotional responses both subjective and situational. Dirkx (2001) argues that emotions play, both positively and negatively, a central role in the way we are motivated to learn. Significantly, emotions impact upon our identity as learners and the way in which we perceive and evaluate learning relationships (Weiss, 2000).

Receiving feedback can, therefore, arouse a range of feelings, depending on the outcome of the assessment (Falchikov and Boud, 2007). These include**:** relief; elation, shame, anxiety, guilt, humiliation, stupidity, anger, embarrassment, disappointment and disbelief (Tennant, 1997). Students may or may not be self-conscious of these emotional states, with some feelings being repressed. Regardless, Scheff (1997) argues emotions and feelings can, and do, impact upon social relations and the way in which students elect to engage. Additionally, some individuals struggle to view feedback commentary and/or the judgements associated with feedback (e.g. grade) dispassionately (Boud, 2009; Yorke; 2003), and this can be a critical factor in shaping student perspectives of: a) the fairness of the assessment; b) the accuracy of their tutor's marking; c) the effectiveness of assessment preparation; d) the tutor's capability. These concerns relate directly to wider performative discourses of student satisfaction and are thus of significance to university management.

Section 4: Dialogic Feedback

3.5 Introduction

Emerging from discourses of SCL and assessment for learning is an increasing focus upon the role that dialogue plays in supporting students to engage more fully with assessment feedback. As Millar (2006) posits "…to secure engagement with feedback it may help to develop strategies which support interaction, mimicking the positive dialogue students seem to want" (n.p). Although Millar's perspective is commonly heard within professional conversations, research into the area of DF remains frustratingly scant and "…fails to recognise it as a unique form of communication" (Higgins et al, 2001, p.269), which is made more problematic by complex issues of "…power, authority, emotion and identity" (Ibid.). This section aims to present extant literature relating to the various philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of dialogue, dialogic feedback and dialogic spaces.

3.51 Differentiating dialogue and monologue

Prior to exploring the nature, purpose and impact of DF, it is important to outline what the terms 'dialogue' and its counter-theory 'monologue' mean within the context of this research. 'Dialogue' comes from the Greek word dialogos: 'logos' meaning 'the word' or, as is commonly understood in the modern-day context, 'the meaning of the word'. 'Dia' means 'through' and not 'two' as is sometimes assumed. As such, 'a dialogue' can be among any number of people, not just two. Within this same argument, I concur with Savin-Baden (2008), who posits that it is not necessary to require or assume partnership or relationship in dialogue, as one can have dialogue with oneself. However, this does not reflect the view of some key thinkers in the dialectical field (e.g. Bakhtin 1981; Buber 1964), who consider dialogue as requiring some external engagement and thus discount internal dialogue with self. Monologue, within the context of this research, is taken to mean "…a discourse in which only one point of view is represented, however diverse the means of representation" (Hays, 2005, p.7). O'Connor and Michaels (2007) assert that monologue is "…usually associated with fixed transmission of unchanging ideas and status of inequalities" (p.277). Such a 'teacher-telling' approach positions the student as a passive recipient of the information which "…results in alienation rather than engagement, provoking general feelings of compliance, powerlessness and subservience rather than a sense of belonging, enthusiasm, enjoyment and ownership of the learning process" (Sambell, 2016, p1).

3.52 Some philosophical considerations of dialogic learning

Philosophically, through critical examination of 'dialogue' and the central role it plays in framing discourses of learning and teaching, the importance of language and communication within educational settings has become accepted. In considering the nature of DF, I draw upon two philosophers: Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) and Paulo Freire (1921-1997). Other than their unquestionable status within the field of linguistics, I have been drawn to these two philosophers for their critical stance regarding the nature of dialogue. Both philosophers' problematisation of dialogue and dialogic learning, create challenging lenses upon which this study can be understood. Further, from a personal perspective, their analogous viewpoint of the power of words and meaning, has had significant impact upon the way I understand my own practice, both within AFT contexts and beyond. Although each of their work on dialogue is extensive, I have aimed to summarise key elements most relevant to the topic under investigation.

The Russian philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin framed all language and thoughts as a social practice: "…in dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body" (1981, p.293). His theory of dialogism argued that truth has an inherently dialogic nature and that:

> Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others… It becomes one's "own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intentions, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language... but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions; it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own (p.294).

In applying Bakhtinian dialogism to educational contexts, we rely on the writing of Matusov (2004), who outlines Bakhtin dialogic pedagogy under two broad terms: monologic and dialogic. In monologised pedagogical dialogue, "…thought is either affirmed or repudiated by the authority of the teacher… In contrast, dialogic pedagogy, is based on… colliding and testing diverse ideas presented by different voices, by different members of a community (Matusov, 2004, p.7). Central to Bakhtin's dialogic pedagogy is the interest that both teacher and student should have in one another. As such, the tutor is not looking for errors in a student's learning, rather they are seeking to understand how the student sees the world as well as

themselves. Thus, "…disagreements between the student and the teacher are valued, respected, and expected" (Matusov, 2004, p.7). For Bakhtin, this:

> …dialogical understanding sees struggle, conflict and difference as a necessary part of meaning-making, rather than something that should or could be overcome. Meaning arises in situations of being met by the Other. Instead of attempting to erase differences, education is dependent upon the contingent spaces of meaning-making that can only arise in response to otherness (Pryor and Crossouard, 2008, p.2)

Bakhtin's theory of monologue and dialogue raises questions for DF and how both students and tutors might perceive its primary role in progressing learning. I argue that whilst AFTs are closely linked to supporting students' understanding of corrections and annotations within their summative feedback, there may be little opportunity for a type of dialogue that actively promotes a divergence of ideas.

The Brazilian critical philosopher Paulo Freire posited, in his political seminal text 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' (2004), that education was akin to a 'banking' model where:

> Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorise and repeat. This is the 'banking' concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends as far as receiving, filing and storing the deposits" (p.72)

Freire (Ibid.) argued that the impact of the banking model was as a passive, powerless student body, primed to receive the tutor's next 'communique' without resistance or critical engagement. Only through 'conscientisation' i.e. a process of developing a critical awareness of one's social reality through reflection and action, could learners develop an understanding their own reality and needs (Freire, 2004). Arguably, the criticisms inherent within 'banking concepts' of education could be applied to those undergraduate degree courses that continue to rely heavily upon high-stake, singular, summative assessment that provide little opportunity for students to reflect-upon and/or discuss the guidance offered by the tutor in their feedback. Thus, through dialogic interaction that prompts and probes students to consider their meta-cognitive development, DF could afford students an opportunity to develop their own 'conscientisation' (Biggs, 2011). Race (2001) argues a similar point, stating that opportunities for students to dialogically engage in their feedback can lead to conscious competence, where individuals have increased self-awareness to direct their own learning.

Both Bakhtin and Freire's work share a common concept within their respective dialogic philosophies of the learner being positioned as an active partner in dialogic process, rather than a passive recipient. Within both philosophical perspectives, this helps to empower the individual to feel equal in the dialogic exchange and accountable for its outcome. Thus, dialogue promotes both democratic and participatory learning, supporting the student to develop confidence to critically engage in their own meaning-making and knowledge construction. Applying this conceptualisation to DF, I argue that Bakhtin and Freire's work has collective potential to influence the way in which DF can be understood as an emancipatory opportunity to liberate students from the traditional, hierarchical power relationships found between themselves and their tutors. The Higher Education Academy's (2017) professional development initiative 'Transforming assessment' supports this idea, situating dialogue and dialogic feedback as critical tenets to help endorse principles and values of democracy, independence and co-construction (Boud and Falchikov, 2007; Brooks and Tough, 2006; Mansell and James, 2009).

The following practice-based definitions of DF will outline key perspectives of its essential nature and purpose and role in supporting learning.

3.53 Defining dialogic feedback

Drawing upon the above concepts of dialogue, attention is now turned to literature pertaining to defining the primary research focus i.e. DF. As previously stated, I have chosen to use Beaumont et al.'s (2011) definition of DF as, "…a system of guidance that provides not only summative judgement of performance but support through opportunities for a discussion which identified areas of improvement and scaffolds the student to help achieve higher grades" (p. 674). This definition has been selected as a starting point for understanding DF because, in my experience of leading AFTs in UoB, it closely reflects the reality of practice. However, as a means of engaging with the wider literature on DF, alternative perspectives and definitions will now be explored.

Carless et al. (2011) suggest DF is "…an interactive exchange in which interpretations are shared, meanings negotiated and expectations clarified" (p.397). Laurillard (2002) adds to this definition, describing the nature of dialogue as iterative, helping the student to apply their understanding to their learning through a process of reflecting and acting upon it. This may be

with or without the tutor's direct intervention. Gravett and Petersen (2002) highlight how DF is more than a conversation or discussion but rather involves a relationship where individuals consider, reflect and reason together. This relationship is particularly important when there are differences in the way that students and tutors perceive the same piece of feedback. DF can then have a reconciliatory role (Askew and Lodge, 2000). Gibbs (2014), drawing upon the work of Walker and Hobson (2014), argues that experiences and opportunities of DF must go beyond simple explication and embrace rich, iterative and penetrating discourse that supports "…both socialisation and discussion into a shared community of understanding" (p.328). Yang and Carless (2013) make a case for emphasising dialogue in the discussion of feedback as "…an explicit attempt to circumvent the limitations of one-way transmission of feedback which frequently arises from the dominant structural constraint of written comments on end of course assignments" (p.286).

From these selected theoretical definitions, there are a number of shared characteristics that underpin DF, namely that it should be: a) adaptive and contingent on students' needs; b) discursive and rich in two-way communicative exchanges; c) interactive and linked to actions related to a task goal, and d) proactive and encouraging students and teachers to reflect on the 'goal-action-feedback cycle' (Laurillard 2002). Building upon Laurillard's (Ibid.) conceptualisation, Carless (2015) argues a number of additional principles, which include DF being:

- a process rather than product
- an experience based upon negotiation and clarification
- an interaction that leads to action and/or reflection
- an experience that perceives peers as active sources of feedback
- a process that can included an inner dialogue with self and the use of internal feedback.

Within these various concepts, there is broad agreement that DF can be a powerful, highly personal, social and relational phenomenon "…that takes place over time, is dialogic, involves activity and is integral to learning and teaching (Sambell, 2016. p.6).

3.54 Dialogic learning spaces

As has been stated, this research explores DF within a specific context – i.e. assessment feedback tutorials (AFTs). As a means of critically understanding the nature of this 'place and space', I draw upon Savin-Baden's (2008) conceptualisation of learning spaces. Savin-Baden (2008) describes these as spaces where "…the values of being are more central than the values of doing. They are places of transition, and sometimes transformation, where the individual experiences some kind of shift or reorientation in their life world" (p.7).

Although there are a number of different types of learning spaces cited in her conceptualisation (e.g. spaces between teacher and learner; learners and territories) key to understanding the nature of AFTs, is the concept of 'textual spaces' in which "…essential 'texts' must be engaged with in academic life" (Savin-Baden, 2008, p.7). Here, essential 'text', could refer to a variety of physical objects gathered in the process of assessment feedback e.g. the marked assignment; the tutor's feedback comments; the grade; cited assessment regulations and associated lecture notes and/or reading. Savin-Baden (2008) argues that textual spaces can be problematic in that, "…rules of academic engagement, particularly related to disciplinary rules, pedagogical signatures and discipline-based pedagogy, are located both within and beyond the text" (p.7). Thus, both tutor and student must engage in a process of dialogic reflection and interpretation to create meaning from the text, taking in both their own and others' perspectives.

Due to the sensitive and personal nature of DF, the textual space needs to be respectful, sensitive, yet appropriately challenging to help the student move over conceptual thresholds of understanding (Wisker et al., 2010). The dialogic interaction students experience "…transforms problematic frames of reference – sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets) – to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change" (Mezirow, 2003, p. 58). However, the successful outcome of such transformational experiences will be in part dependent on the student/tutor relationship. Citing Bhabha (1994), Biesta (2010) describes the gap between learner and teacher as "…a third space of enunciation in which meaning forever escapes us — that is forever beyond our control" (p.10). Biesta (Ibid.) asserts that:

> We cannot close *this* gap by trying to "reach out" to our partners in communication, by trying to listen to them, by trying to understand them, because each time that we return our understandings to them, a new gap emerges, a new third space of enunciation comes into existence. The main advantage of understanding communication in this way is that it can help us to see that any attempt to close the gap always requires force — either by forcefully putting forward a particular representation of what, in itself, is

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unrepresentable, or by selecting and rewarding from a wide variety of meanings and actions those that are considered to be "right" or "true." The latter has been my description of the process of educational assessment when the orientation is toward qualification and socialisation (p.3).

Biesta (Ibid.) qualifies this perspective stating that when "subjectification" and knowledge transmission are the core intent of education assessment, then a significant gap can appear within the student/tutor relationship. The tutor, based upon their authority, experience and qualification, are understood to be the 'experts' in this relationship whereas the student - who has yet to graduate into the academic community – is positioned as novice. From such a perspective, "…negative fissures, disjunctions, and disconnections" (Ibid.) within a student's understanding are closed by normative ideas and accepted ways of understanding.

Section 5: The Student Self

3.6 Introduction

This final section addresses key literature relating to aspects of the student-self. This theoretical area was explored at a latter point in the research journey, when the fieldwork interviews had been conducted and the data analysis of the first four research questions completed. At that point in the research, the findings had revealed a number of puzzling tensions and conflicts relating to the way students presented themselves to their tutor, within the AFT. Engagement with literature relating to student behaviour led me to the concept of liminality (Turner, 1974); the dramaturgical conceptions of self (Goffman, 1959) and psycho-sociological theory of self-presentation behaviour (Schütz, 1998). Collectively, these theorisations helped to build a conceptual lens of self-presentation upon which the student behaviour could be interpreted.

3.61 The liminal space

The period between students receiving their grade and meeting with their tutor for an AFT can be understood as a liminal space. Within this period of time, the student is at a critical point between existing and future understanding, and this space is likely to be filled with intense emotions. Where students have failed an assignment, or gained a very low grade, this moment may also prompt them to question whether they should continue studying and remain on the degree course. As a means of understanding liminality further, I draw upon Turner's (1974) definition which describes it as "…the midpoint of transition in a status-sequence between two positions" (Turner, 1974, p.237). Liminal spaces, being at the midpoint of transition, was described by Turner (1974) as 'betwixt and between': neither one nor the other. Cousin (2006) explains that the liminal state is:

> ….an unstable space in which the learner may oscillate between old and emergent understandings just as adolescents often move between adult-like and child-like responses to their transitional status. But once a learner enters this liminal space, she is engaged with the project of mastery unlike the learner who remains in a state of pre-liminality in which understandings are at best vague (Ibid., p.4)

For Turner (1974), a critical aspect at this stage in a students' learning is how they perceive themselves and the extent to which they attend to the development of their student identity and seek support. Cousin (2006) concurs, arguing that fundamentally, "Learning is a form of identity work" (p. 264). Field and Morgan-Klein (2010) argue that students who are less

confident and/or comfortable with their student identity may develop a 'relational identity' that accounts for feelings associated with 'outsiderness' and isolation. Meyer and Land (2005) argue that these students may find themselves in a "stuck place" (p.373), unsure of their own identity or membership of their immediate learning community. Liminality, within the context of this research is taken to mean moments of transition and transformation where there are shifts in the learner's subjectivity (Meyer and Land, 2005) and formulation (and re-formulation) of the learners' meaning frame (Schwartzman, 2010). Walker (2013) argues that such conceptual shifts can cause students discomfort as they experience "cognitive dissonance" (p.250) resulting in an internal motivation to try to reduce or eradicate these alien, and often confrontational, feelings. At these points, students may try to resist change by disengaging in the learning process in an attempt to preserve the status-quo. Thus, striking the balance between challenge and support is a primary concern for managing the DF experience and student/tutor relationship within it.

> Too much uncertainty in this liminal state and the learner will not be able to progress beyond a surface understanding. Not enough uncertainty and the learner will not make the required transformation into a fully participating member of a community of practice (Walker 2013, p.250).

Boyd and Meyers (1988) assert that learners must be emotionally open to the possibility of transformation in the first place and willing to accommodate "…alternative expressions of meaning" (p. 277). Cousin (2006) argues that not all students want to travel the "unsafe journey" of deeper learning, often "…substituting mimicry for mastery" replacing integrated learning into something more akin to a "ritualised performance" (p.139). The result of such mimicry is that the learning experience fails to challenge students' deeply held conceptions and thus has less transformative potential. As a means of combating this potentially negative response, Bamber (2016) states that students must be made aware of the challenges they will face in their study, as a means of resisting the sanitisation of the 'learning experience'. Within both the complex liminal space and the challenging process of transformation, Meyer et al. (2010) state that there is often:

> …an 'underlying game' in which ways of thinking and practising, that are often left tacit, come to be recognised, grappled with and gradually understood. This underlying game is a common feature of the processes of entry, meaning making and identity formation typically required for entry to a given community of practice (p.xi).

They argue that, within the "underlying game' (Ibid.), some students have certain dispositions, values and attitudes that are highly regarded not only by academics but also by their peers.

These students are able to 'read the game' by interpreting the tutors' cues, giving them an advantage in understanding the tacit disciplinary codes and rules that frame assessment. Often these codes are the same, or similar to, those experienced within compulsory education (Aittola, 1995). However, non-traditional students may struggle with the inculcation into HE culture, finding difficulty in de-coding the subliminal messages inherent within subject discourses. Such 'cue deafness' can lead to isolation and rejection from the community (Reay et al., 2005).

3.62 The self as actor

From considering theoretical literature relating to liminality, attention is drawn to the work of Goffman (1959) and the concept of presentation of self. Goffman (1959) explains that self-presentation theory examines:

> …the way in which the individual in ordinary work situations presents himself and his activity to others, the ways in which he guides and controls the impression they form of him, and the kinds of things he may and may not do while sustaining his performance before them. (p. xi).

Drawing upon the metaphor of theatre, Goffman proposes that, within our everyday social interactions the actor (individual) puts on a performance, on a stage to an audience of others. The 'front' (i.e. the appearance and behaviour) the actor puts on, helps to create a character that s/he feels develops "…congruence between one's self-concept and the feedback one receives from the social groups to which they belong" (Schulz, 2012, p.2). As a means of negotiating this, the actor may use 'sign-vehicles' (e.g. costumes, props and masks) as well as "…posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gestures" (Goffman, 1959, p.24). In doing so, Sandstrom et al. (2006) argue, the actor conveys their "…desires, feelings, beliefs and self-images into communicable form, drawing on words, gestures, scripts, props, scenery and various features of appearance" (p.105) to an audience. This behaviour helps the individual to present themselves as "…an acceptable person: one who it entitled to certain kinds of expertise, who is morally relatively unblemished" (Miller, 1995, p.1). As such, potentially difficult or embarrassing social situations can be avoided (Smith, 2006).

3.63 Self-presentation theory

From Goffman's (1959) body of work, the theory of self-presentation has significantly evolved within the psycho-sociological field. Building upon the work of Goffman (Ibid.), Hepper et al.

(2010) describe the phenomenon of self-presentation (often referred to as impression management in the literature) thus:

> People are motivated to possess a positive self-concept. They often go to great lengths to attain positive views of the self (self-enhance) and avoid negative views of the self (self-protect) (p.3).

Baumeister and Hutton (1987) categorise self-presentation behaviours as a class of motivations that are "…in part stable dispositions of individuals but they depend on situational factors to elicit them" (p.71). A further definition comes from Schlenker (1980) who states that: "Self-presentation is expressive. Individuals construct an image of themselves to claim personal identity, and present themselves in a manner that is consistent with that image" (p.37). Schlenker (1980) draws attention to the way in which we construct an 'ideal self' – for a given situation or context – then behave in ways that most closely align to this construction.

Thus, three key functions of self-presentation include:

- To facilitate social interaction: Goffman (1959) identified that the fundamental purpose of self-presentation is to define the nature of a social situation, which includes defining the various roles which we are expected to fulfil within the social world we inhabit.
- To gain material and social rewards: Jones (1990) asserts that individuals may behave in certain ways as a means of creating impressions of themselves in the minds of others, in order to gain material and social rewards (or avoid material and social punishments).
- To self-construct: Baumeister (1982) and Schlenker (1980) both argued that, through creating an impression of ourselves in the minds of others we also construct a particular identity for ourselves. Convincing others that we possess some quality or attribute, is a means of convincing ourselves.

Building upon this body of work, Schütz (1998) developed the theory of self-presentation further to create a "…widely accepted taxonomy of self-presentation" (Boeije, p.4, 2004). Schütz (1998) argued that individuals may or may not display a behaviour, dependent upon:

> …the person's underlying intentions (Is the actor trying to achieve positive impressions or trying to avoid negative typifications?) as well as the level of activity or aggression

involved. Each style is characterised by specific strategies and has its own advantages as well as its own pitfalls (Ibid., p. 623).

Schütz's (1998) taxonomy of four main styles of self-presentation i.e. assertive, offensive, protective and defensive is shown in the table below. For each of these styles, Schütz described a number of typical (although not exclusive) behaviours. Commonly, these 'typical behaviours' overlap and more than one may be in in evidence at any given time (see right hand column in table below).

	Self-presentation styles	Summary	Typical behaviours
1	Assertive	Individuals actively, but not aggressively, build positive impressions. In the process of assertive self-presentation, actors present desirable attributes in a given situation	• Ingratiation • Exemplification • Self-promotion • Power display • Identification
2	Offensive	Offensive self-presentation is an aggressive way of establishing a desired image. Individuals using offensive self-presentation dominate or derogate others in order to make themselves look good	• Derogating competitors • Critical evaluation of a third party • Criticising the questioner • Attacking the source of criticism • Determining the topic of discussion
3	Protective	Individuals showing protective behaviour do not try to look good or favourable but simply not look bad. Efforts are not devoted to attaining a desired identity but to avoid damaging social identities already established or assumed	• Avoiding public attention • Minimal self-disclosure • Cautious self-description • Minimising social interaction • Remaining silent • Passive but friendly interaction
4	Defensive	When a desired identity has been threatened/damaged it may be necessary to minimise the effect by fighting off negative typifications/images using defensive tactics to reduce the negative impact of such events	• Denial • Reframing • Dissociation • Justification • Excuses • Concession, apologies, and remediation

Table 4: Taxonomy of self-presentation styles (Schütz, 1998) (adapted)

Schütz's (1998) taxonomy offers a useful framework around which the nature and function of self-presentation can be understood. Through detailing typical behaviours relating to each

style, Schütz makes connection between public displays of behaviour and the individual's personal self-conception. On this same point, her taxonomy offers variety, showing how individuals might respond differently in situations. Further, the taxonomy offers the means by which this regulated behaviour aims to create an impression of themselves in the minds of other people. For these reasons, as will be detailed in the following chapter, I elected to use Schütz's (1998) taxonomy to support the analytical process that addressed the fifth research question i.e.

5. Is there evidence within the data of students strategically managing their DF experience through the use of self-presentational behaviours? If so, what meaning can be made from this?

CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the way in which the research was designed and the fieldwork conducted. It identifies key ethical concerns addressed throughout the study and presents processes employed in both the data collection and analysis. The research approach of IPA will be detailed and a rationale for its suitability in addressing the research questions will be presented.

Research questions:

1. What do undergraduate students perceive the nature of dialogic feedback to be?
2. How do undergraduate students understand the purpose of dialogic feedback?
3. How do undergraduate students describe their emotions and feelings relating to dialogic feedback experiences?
4. Within the context of dialogic feedback, how do undergraduate students perceive their relationship with the marking tutor?
5. Is there evidence within the data of students strategically managing their DF experience through the use of self-presentational behaviours? If so, what meaning can be made from this?

Divided into three distinct sections, this chapter outlines the main methodological deliberations that have been considered and employed to shape both the process and outcomes of the research.

Section 1, 'Theoretical foundations underpinning the research methodology', covers philosophical ground relevant to the selection and construction of the research design. It acknowledges the various research approaches considered and justifies why an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach was deemed appropriate for addressing the research aim. The section concludes by outlining some key reflections relating to ethical and reflexive concerns which have been systematically addressed to ensure both the quality of the research and my researcher practice.

Section 2, 'Research design and conduct of fieldwork', builds upon the previous section's theoretical discussion of the research design, to focus upon important aspects of the fieldwork undertaken. These include: the method of data collection; the process of selecting the eight second-year undergraduate students; the creation of the interview schedule and fieldwork activities.

Section 3, 'Data analysis', draws upon Smith et. al.'s (1999) paper that details a six-step model of conducting an IPA of rich data collected from the fieldwork. A summarised account of each step of the process is offered and includes reflections on the practicalities and challenges of the adopted approach. The section will conclude with some reflections of ethical practice and insider-research.

Section 1: Theoretical foundations underpinning the research methodology

4.21 Philosophical foundations of the research

To achieve a high-quality piece of research, each stage must be carefully planned to ensure that it is rigorous, systematic, coherent and ethically sound (Gibbs, 2008). However, I believe that the research design should neither discount a degree of flexibility within the process, nor restrict the possibility for personalisation, which permits the direction of the study to be modified as the project unfolds. As Crotty (1998) states, a research design acts as a:

> …scaffold, providing the researcher with a sense of stability and direction as they go on to do their own building; that is as they move towards understanding and expounding the research process after their own fashion in formats that suit their particular purposes (p.2).

This research takes an IPA approach (Smith et al., 1999), which will now be discussed within the following section.

4.22 Interpretative phenomenological analysis

IPA has been specifically developed by a British academic, Jonathan Smith (Smith et al., 1995). Building upon Husserl's founding phenomenological assertion of the importance and relevance of a focus on experience and its perception, Smith – in the mid 1990s – drew upon a number of different ideas to form the IPA approach. Underpinning IPA's theoretical foundation are aspects of phenomenology (Giorgi, 1995), hermeneutics (Palmer, 1969), symbolic interactionism (Brewer et al., 2008) and engagement with subjective experience and personal accounts (Smith, et al., 1995).

Reflective of my own ontological assumptions, IPA is rooted in:

> …critical realism (Bhaskar, 1978) and the social cognition paradigm (Fiske and Taylor, 1991). Critical realism accepts that there are stable and enduring features of reality that exist independently of human conceptualisation. Differences in the meanings individuals attach to experiences are considered possible because they experience different parts of reality. The social cognition paradigm is founded on the premise that human speech and behaviour reflects these differences in meaning either directly or indirectly (Fade, 2004, p.647).

Thus, critical realism proposes "…an ontology that assumes there exists a reality 'out there' independent of observers" (Easton, 2010, p.120). However, at the same time it also "…accepts that reality is socially constructed" (Ibid.). Critical realists resolve the tension between these two apparently contradictory positions by arguing that:

> …the world is socially constructed but not entirely so. The "real" world breaks through and sometime destroys the complex stories that we create in order to understand and explain the situations we research (Ibid., p.210).

Critical realism therefore admits an inherent subjectivity in the production of knowledge, which is not invalidated by conflicting alternative perspectives (Watkins, 1994; Finlay and Ballinger, 2006). Although critical realism shares the realist ambition to gain a better understanding of what is 'really' going on in the world, it also acknowledges that the data the researcher gathers may not provide direct access to this reality (Willig, 2013). Therefore, critical realist researchers often select approaches that provide a rich and comprehensive description of a phenomenon or experience from the participants' perspective, which communicates to readers a sense of quality and texture. IPA is one such approach that enables this duality of rich description and interpretation (Smith and Osborn, 2007; Willig, 2013).

As a qualitative approach, IPA involves a detailed investigation of how individuals make sense of their personal and social world (Flowers et.al, 1999). As such, phenomena are experienced and perceived individually and always viewed as fluid and subjective (Bhaskar, 1978; Finlay, 2006). Shinebourne (2011) provides a comprehensive definition of IPA:

> IPA tries to understand what the world is like from the point of view of the participants. At the same time, it acknowledges that this understanding is always mediated by the context of cultural and socio-historical meanings. Therefore, the process of making sense of experience is inevitably interpretative and the role of the researcher in trying to make sense of the participant's account is complicated by the researcher's own conceptions (p.44).

Both subjective and idiographic in nature (i.e. it is concerned with individual accounts of participants' experiences), IPA explores individuals' recollections on a case-by-case basis, looking for convergence and divergence within homogenous groups, and only raising more general claims after the potential of the individual case has been fully realised (Smith et al., 2009). Thus, IPA is "…a meaning-focused, qualitative method, which is committed to understanding the first-person perspective from the third-person position, so far as is possible, through intersubjective inquiry and analysis" (Smith et al., 2009, p.6). Critical within this process is the role of the researcher who, as an interpreter, has to "…assume the burden of

meaning-making, which is no longer a neutral process that simply matches word to world" (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2008, p.969).

Drawing upon individuals' perceptions of their 'life-world' – through the examination of the meanings that significant experiences/events/states hold for participants – is a fundamental aspect of the IPA approach. Such life events that are of interest to the IPA researcher may be positive or negative, planned or unplanned. They may be bounded and discrete or more pervasive, stretching over a longer period of time and requiring differing levels of proactive agency or action from the individual (Smith et.al, 2009). Regardless, following Husserl's fundamental premise that phenomenologists should 'go back to the things themselves', IPA attempts not to "…fix experience in predefined or overly abstract categories" (Smith et.al, 2009). Rather, Smith et.al (2009) argue that IPA is primarily "…concerned with an individual's personal perception or account of an object or event, as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself" (p.21). They define IPA as "…the complex understanding of 'experience' invokes a lived process, an unfurling of perspectives and meaning, which are unique to the person's embodied and situated relationship to the world" (Ibid.).

Thus, IPA relies on participants' recall and reporting of experiences. In order to understand the meaning of this complex conception, Smith et al. (2009) hypothesise that 'experience' can be placed upon a differentiating hierarchy based upon the degree of consciousness we afford to that experience:

> At the most elemental level, we are constantly caught up, unselfconsciously, in the everyday flow of experience. As soon as we become aware of what is happening we have the beginnings of what can described as 'an experience' as opposed to just experience (p2).

Smith et.al (2009) expand upon this notion to offer a conceptual framework for IPA research activities which starts with selecting a 'comprehensive unit' (in the case of this research it was students' experience of taking part in an AFT and what this meant to their perceptions of DF). The comprehensive unit is further divided into 'parts of a life' which Smith et al. (2009) assert may well be separated in time but are linked somehow with a common meaning. From previous research and piloting the research questions, I identified the associated 'parts' of students' accounts of their experiences of DF within AFTs as being:

- What reasons did students give for booking an AFT?

- How did students feel about requesting an AFT?

- How did students organise and manage the booking of an AFT?

- How did students experience the setting of the AFT agenda?

- What emotions and feelings did students experience before, during and after DF with their tutor?

- How did students understand their role and that of the tutor in the DF?

- What expectations did students have of DF with their tutor?

- How did students perceive DF in comparison to other experiences of feedback?

- What did students do after the conclusion of the AFT?

- What, if any, impact did students perceive DF to have upon them and their learning?

Through the researcher engaging in fieldwork (in this case semi-structured interviews) participants recall memories, thoughts and feelings relating to each of 'the parts' which, in turn, provides data for the researcher to interpret and discover connectivity and meaning. Thus, due to the essential essence of IPA being framed by interpretative activity, it falls within the hermeneutic research tradition. More specifically, it is double hermeneutic in that, as humans are 'sense-making creatures', "the participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world" (Smith et al., 2009, p.9). This double hermeneutic stance combines both empathetic hermeneutics (i.e. concerned with trying to understand what it is like, from the point of view of the participants, to take their side) with a questioning hermeneutics that involves asking critical questions of the participants' texts e.g.:

- What is the participant trying to achieve?

- Is something 'leaking out' that wasn't intended?

- Do I have a sense of something going on that maybe the participants themselves are un-aware of?

Thus, it is acknowledged that interpretations are bounded by participants' abilities to articulate their thoughts and experiences adequately (Baillie et al., 2000) and, it would follow, by the researcher's ability to reflect, interpret and analyse them.

4.23 Justification for employing an IPA approach

The decision to use an IPA approach was based upon a number of important factors summarised below.

Critically, the philosophic underpinnings of IPA closely reflect my own ontological, critical realist assumption. It bridges the essentialist-discursive divide, as the text of an individual's perceptions can be analysed both in itself (i.e. idiosyncratic) and scrutinised for wider interpretive meaning (i.e. theorising for shared experience) (Smith, 2007). This allows the researcher to develop research data that are applicable in real-world settings that exist outside of an individual's experience (Reid et al., 2005) and offers a degree of flexibility in both design and use (Ware and Ravel, 2007).

Whilst IPA has been widely used within clinical psychology, medicine, nursing and related disciplines (Reid et al., 2005), it appears that few educational research papers have elected to use Smith's IPA approach. Within the broader field of educational phenomenological research, van Manen's work (1996) was considered at the planning stage of this study. However, due to its more philosophical, rather than psychosocial focus, it was rejected in favour of Smith's IPA framework. Finally, mindful of Ashwin's (2012) concern that much research in HE is "...largely through the examination of the relation between students' and academics' scores on questionnaire inventories" (p.36), I chose to redress this imbalance by employing an approach that produces a deeper, more contextualised understanding of the individual student voice. In doing so, I deliberately place greater value on the individual lived-experience, respecting the student as expert in relaying their reality, and closely reflecting my ethical values and professional beliefs.

4.24 Criticisms of IPA

Collins and Nicolson (2002) outline a key concern of IPA from their own research, stating that:

> …in undertaking in-depth 'interpretative engagement with the respondent's text', there was a sense that data were also becoming diluted by this disaggregation and unitisation of the data, and it is questionable whether IPA in its search for connections, similarities or divergences across cases misses a potentially richer seam of data, that of a contextualized, unfolding and sequential account within a single interview, which in this case, might lead to a more informed understanding of patient satisfaction" (p.627).

I appreciate the concern expressed that if an IPA researcher moves too swiftly through the IPA analytical stages to seek common or shared experiences, then the data could become de-personalised and more unique experiences lost. If the level of the analytical process is elevated too quickly – to broader, more conceptual ideas – then I could foresee IPA becoming little more than a detailed thematic analysis. As a means of addressing this concern (as will be shown in more detail in the Data Analysis section) I ensured the following:

- A thorough, six-step, analysis of the data (Smith et al., 1999) was completed, interrogating each of the eight individual transcripts in turn.
- An iterative, 'back-and-forth' approach to the analytical process was employed, i.e. returning to previous steps in the analytical process to ensure that points of interest had not been overlooked.
- Illustrative extracts from different participants were used to generate discussion of the themes. It was at this stage that I wanted to ensure the "…unique nature of each participant's experience to re-emerge" (Smith et al., 1999, p.235).
- In order to reflect the inductive, rather than theory-driven research IPA process adopted, the extant literature presented in the previous chapter was kept deliberately broad. Having become familiar with the breadth of DF literature and research, I felt better prepared to approach the complex process of meaning-making from the findings and more confident to conceptualise the study as a whole.

4.25 Other approaches considered

From the outset of this research, I felt committed to taking an IPA approach for reasons already cited. However, this did not preclude a period of intensive reflection upon other approaches and careful consideration of their merits.

I contemplated adopting a grounded theory approach which shares some broad similarities to IPA. For example, grounded theory relies upon the interpretative skills of the researcher and, like IPA, draws upon them throughout the analytical process. It also uses similar methods of data collection as IPA (e.g. semi-structured interviews) and draws upon thick data within the analytical process. However, key differences between grounded theory and IPA exist. Although both rely on the interpretative process, IPA uses the double hermeneutic where "…access depends on and is complicated by the researcher's own conceptions in order to make

sense of that other personal world through a process of interpretative activity" (Smith et.al, 1999, pp 218-29). Joint reflections of both participant and researcher form the analytic account produced (Smith, 2007). Grounded theory, however, predominantly relies on a long and careful inductive analysis of the data, without preconceptions of established theory. Further, grounded theory has a sociological approach (Willig, 2013) that identifies convergences within a larger sample to support wider conceptual explanations and theory building. IPA, by contrast, takes a psychological perspective and is concerned with giving a more detailed and nuanced account of the personal experiences of a smaller sample (Smith and Osborn, 2007). This, I felt, was more in keeping with the research aims.

Another approach considered was Foucauldian discourse analysis. I had some previous experience of using this method within Stage 1 of the EdD and, like grounded theory, it shares some similarities to IPA. However, as Willig (2013) states, "Foucauldian discourse analysis cannot (and does not aspire to) tell us anything about what specific individuals are actually feeling and thinking at a particular point in time" (p.117). As already stated, this was a primary concern for my professional research. However, I do acknowledge the potential usefulness of Foucauldian discourse analysis in understanding societal discourses influencing individual perspectives. Finally, narrative analysis was also considered, as it is an approach concerned with the interpretative activities of the researcher. However, in IPA, narrative analysis is viewed as being one of many ways of meaning-making. Other analytical tools available to the IPA researcher include discourse and metaphor analysis. Thus, although I have not discounted narrative in the process of making sense of the data, I have not been constrained by this as a single method (Smith et al. 2009).

4.26 Ensuring research quality

On the matter of ensuring the overall quality of this research, I have not subscribed to traditional research terminology that describes: a) the precision of the data (i.e. validity); b) consistency of the analytical procedures (i.e. reliability) and c) the transferability of the findings to other settings (i.e. generalisability) (Long and Johnson, 2000). I believe such terms, often used in quantitative study, do not fully reflect the complex, individual nature and purpose of qualitative research. Thus, more appropriate concepts, as presented by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.134), have been drawn upon for guidance. These include a concern for:

- *credibility* that refers to the confidence in the 'truth' of the findings
- *dependability* which relates to the 'trustworthiness' by which the methods have been undertaken
- *confirmability* which is achieved when truth value, consistency and applicability have been addressed
- *transferability* which considers whether findings can be applied to other contexts, settings or groups.

A number of practical strategies have been employed throughout the planning and execution of this research to ensure its quality. These include:

- keeping an ongoing research journal, with detailed field notes gathered from each of the interviews (i.e. confirmability)
- holding regular meetings with supervisor and other researchers to discuss progress, reduce bias and share/justify interpretations of findings (i.e. dependability)
- acknowledging my insider status and reflecting upon how this could potentially impact both positively and negatively upon the research (i.e. confirmability)
- sharing transcripts and findings chapters with each of the participants as a means of ensuring accurate representation and transparency (i.e. credibility)
- including rich and thick verbatim descriptions from all participants' accounts to support findings (i.e. transferability)
- employing a detailed, 6-step IPA model (Smith et.al, 1999) to ensure order and clarity of thought during the process of data analysis and interpretation (i.e. confirmability)
- accounting for my ethical planning and practice, to ensure both the protection of the individual participant and the quality of the data (all).

4.27 Reflexivity

Finally, within this discussion regarding quality, I reflect upon the concept of reflexivity within the context of this research. Reflexivity is a process "…whereby the researcher reflects continuously on how their own actions, values and perceptions impact upon the research setting and can affect data collection and analysis" (Gerrish and Lacey, 2006). Traditionally, researchers carrying out phenomenological studies have aimed to 'bracket out' their

preconceptions (Colaizzi, 1978; Moustakas, 1994) using reflexive methods such as writing memos (Cutcliffe, 2003); engaging in interviews outside of the participant group (Rolls and Relf, 2006) and keeping research journals (Ahern, 1999). Starks and Trinidad (2007) assert that such methods help the researcher to be;

> …honest and vigilant about her own perspective, pre-existing thoughts and beliefs, and developing hypotheses... engage in the self-reflective process of 'bracketing', whereby they recognise and set aside (but do not abandon) their *a priori* knowledge and assumptions, with the analytic goal of attending to the participants' accounts with an open mind (p. 1376).

Smith et al. (1999) offer an alternative perspective, stating that the purpose of IPA is to attempt, as far as possible, to gain an insider perspective of the phenomenon being studied, acknowledging that the researcher is the primary analytical instrument. The researcher's beliefs are not seen as biases to be eliminated but rather as being necessary for making sense of the experiences of the participants. Thus, reflexivity is viewed as an optional tool, enabling the researcher to formally acknowledge his or her interpretative role and not an essential technique for removing bias or previous engagement with the topic being explored.

I concur with Smith et al.'s (1999) position outlined above. Due to this research being developed from previous studies on students' experiences of feedback undertaken within the first stage of the EdD, I do not claim it to be entirely inductive. Indeed, it has been "…influenced by a meta theoretical position that has been derived from and is grounded in, rather than predates and constrains, a body of data" (Smith, et al., 1999, p. 412). My own extensive professional practice experience of leading AFTs with undergraduate students has also informed my understanding of the topic and influenced interpretation of related data. As such, I have not attempted to 'bracket out' or "…suspend any existing knowledge of the field and personal experiences within it … in an attempt to 'see' the world as it is experienced by the respondent" (Flowers et al. 1999, p.482), as I do not feel this would be either possible or useful within the context of this professional research.

However, I have engaged in some broader reflexive activities as a means of ensuring my conscious awareness of the experiences and bias I bring to the project. My use of a research journal has been invaluable in supporting the process of "…sorting out the qualities that belong to the researcher's experience of the phenomenon" (Drew, 2004, p. 215). In addition, I have regularly shared my research progress with supervisors and critical friends, all of whom have

constructively challenged my perspectives and assumptions. Further, in the process of transcribing the interviews and writing-up the data, I shared copies with the participants for their perspectives on accuracy and interpretation.

Section 2: Research design and conduct of fieldwork

4.3 Introduction

This section builds upon the previous chapter's theoretical discussion of the research, to focus upon specific aspects of how the fieldwork was conducted. Thus, consideration will be given to the method of data collection, ethical research practice, insider-research, interviewing, and the role of the researcher.

4.31 Data collection methods

Semi-structured interviews are commonly used in qualitative studies (Rallis and Rossman, 1998) as the data gathered "…is most often people's words and actions, and thus requires methods that allow the researcher to capture language and behaviour" (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994, p.46). Smith (2007) also advises that semi-structured interviews are the most suitable method for collecting data in IPA studies. He argues that they create a platform for an interactive guided conversation between researcher and participant and thus are not as controlled as more formal structured interview techniques.

Within the exchange that takes place in a semi-structured interview, the researcher can – through the employment of an interview schedule of pre-planned questions – cover key topics pertinent to the research aim (Flick, 2014). The interview schedules for the scoping and follow-up interviews are presented in Appendix 1 and 2 respectively. Generally, although not exclusively, the interview schedule in IPA research consists of open-ended questions. Such styled questions maximise the opportunity for participants to offer individual responses, personalised from their own experiences and perspectives. Prompt questions can also be used by the researcher to seek more detail about a participants' answer and/or to add a further perspective. As such, there is a degree of flexibility in semi-structured interviews that allows both the researcher and participant to explore the questions posed and responses given. This is a significant feature of this type of interview and makes it highly suitable for IPA research which aims to pursue idiosyncratic experiences and perceptions of a phenomenon.

However, like all methods, semi-structured interviews are not free from criticism or concern. First, on a practical level, they are intensive and time-consuming, both in terms of arranging and conducting the interview as well as transcribing and analysing the wealth of data collected.

Second, sample size is usually small (due to the amount of time they take) raising some concerns about representation and generalisability. Third, there is a need for the researcher to articulate their planned questions artfully, whilst also generating new questions and/or probes 'on the spot' to maintain the momentum of the interview. Wengraf (2001) even speaks of "double attention", which means:

> …that you must be both listening to the informant's responses to understand what he or she is trying to get at and, at the same time, you must be bearing in mind your needs to ensure that all your questions are liable to get answered within the fixed time at the level of depth and detail that you need (p.149).

Wengraf (2001) also raises the potential issue of how the researcher manages the content of the interview. For example, participants may decide to direct the conversation into areas perhaps not anticipated within the interview schedule. At this point, the researcher must make a swift decision as to whether to encourage the diversion, or re-direct the conversation back to a more planned pathway. Finally, there is a pressure for the researcher to remain neutral throughout the interview, maintaining an open and relaxed body language that does not offer unconscious signals or cues that may guide the respondent to offer answers 'sought' by the interviewer (e.g. excessively nodding in agreement). This can be a challenge in the relaxed, almost conversational context of a semi-structured interview.

From the literature, Kvale (1994) outlines 10 common concerns of qualitative research and in particular, the validity and rigour of interviewing as a fieldwork method.

> Ten standardised responses to the stimulus "qualitative research interview" are discussed: it is not scientific, not objective, not trustworthy, nor reliable, not intersubjective, not a formalised method, not hypothesis testing, not quantitative, not generalisable, and not valid. With the objections to qualitative interviews highly predictable, they may be taken into account when designing, reporting, and defending an interview (p.147).

In response to these concerns, I re-assert my belief in the core value of qualitative research in understanding the social world which we inhabit. I argue that my epistemological and ontological assumptions reinforce the validity of my research design and reflect the core intention of IPA research i.e. "…to enter, as far as possible, the psychological and social world of the respondent… where respondents can be perceived as the experiential expert on the subject and should therefore be allowed maximum opportunity to tell their own story." (Smith and Osborn, 2007, p. 59). Semi-structured interviews therefore afford such opportunity as they

grant the researcher a flexible medium within which an empathetic relationship with the participant can be developed and individual accounts can be told.

4.32 Design of interview schedule

Smith (2007) advises that producing an interview schedule before conducting the fieldwork,

> …forces us to think explicitly about what we think/hope the interview might cover… it enables us to think of difficulties that might be encountered, for example, in terms of question wording or sensitive areas, and to give some thought to how these difficulties might be handled (p.59).

The final interview schedules for this research (see Appendix 1 and 2) were informed from experiences of conducting previous semi-structured interviews within the first stage of the EdD. From piloting the questions with three second-year undergraduate students (from a different course than the participants) I made some amendments to my original planned questions. From the outcome of the pilot, I made the decision to address research questions 1 and 2 within the scoping interview, then use the follow-up interview for research questions 3 and 4. I compiled 10 open-ended questions for each of the scoping and follow-up interviews. The final interview questions were a mixture of both general and specific that contributed to building a detailed picture of the wider topic of DF and students' experiences and perceptions of it. General questions were posed at the beginning of the interview, to open up discussion and help the participant to feel more relaxed. These moved to more specific probes to focus participants' recounts. I also created a number of prompts that were designed to help ensure the continuity of the interview.

Upon reflection, drawing up an interview schedule was useful for a number of reasons. I found that, in its production, I was able to carefully consider what I wanted the interview to address and how the arrangement of the questions would work best to encourage participants' engagement. On a more personal level, the process of writing – and re-writing the questions – afforded opportunity for reflexivity. The list of questions was reviewed and refined continuously to challenge any bias and/or assumption. This process was supported by some helpful student volunteers who offered their critical insight and feedback with regards to issues of order and wording.

4.33 Selection of participants

Participants were selected using purposeful sampling which Maxwell (1997) defines as an approach where, ''…particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices" (p.87). DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) posit that it is common for IPA research to adopt purposeful sampling as a means of trying "…to find a fairly homogeneous sample in order to explore experiences of a specific, shared event" (p. 317). In response to the suggestion for the research to find a homogenous sample, I put into place a number of selection criteria as follows.

All invited participants were from the second year of a single, undergraduate social science degree programme at the UoB. I selected this programme as I am familiar with its structure, assessment framework and the kind of AFTs offered by tutors. The programme is not taught at the campus on which I am based, hence, I had no previous contact with the participants through my role within the School of Education. My justification for focusing upon the year 2 cohort was three-fold. First, I knew that students would have had sufficient opportunity to request an AFT. Second, as IPA does not seek to compare or contrast data across different groups of respondents, I did not look to arrange either stratified samples (e.g. from first, second and third-years) or comparative groups (e.g. data collected from students on different programmes). Finally, as much research in HE either focuses upon first years and their transition into HE or final year students and their graduation into the workplace, I felt that concentrating on second-year students added a further dimension of interest and uniqueness to the study.

All 34 second-year students on the selected social science degree programme were invited to volunteer to participate in the research via university email (see Appendix 3). As the research explores a bounded context of the AFT, I included a statement on the invitation to prospective participants requesting that they had experience of at least one AFT, since beginning their university career. The invitation was written in a way so as to not imply that students were obliged to be part of the research or, if they did not volunteer, they would be penalised. Attached to the email was a participant information sheet (see Appendix 4) which included ethical details relating to how the data would be anonymised and pseudonyms used to protect their identity. My target group was eight participants in total. This is deemed quite a sizeable group for an IPA piece of research, however, such numbers provided a degree of diversity that allowed for some cross-case theorisation (Smith and Osbourn, 2007).

From the invitation, I received eleven positive responses from students who had experienced at least one AFT in their time at University, due to a failed assignment. These responses were divided into a group of 5 males and 6 females. My decision to separate the group by gender in the first instance was that, although gender was not a factor upon which the research questions depended, I felt strongly that voices from both male and female students should be heard. Hence, this decision was motivated by both personal responsibility and ethical concern. I was able to filter the group further, to make my final selection of 4 males and 4 females, based upon their availability over the planned period intended for interviewing. Each of the final eight students selected to participate had:

- booked an AFT due to failing an assessment (i.e. being given a grade below 40%), rather than just receiving a weak mark
- met with their marking tutor – for an AFT – after receiving their grade. Typically, this was within a two-week period of getting their grade returned. Due to the way in which the University operates its examination boards, none of the students would have known – when attending AFT – their academic future on the course.

Following the selection, I personally emailed all those students not selected, thanking them for offering their time and explaining the process that I had undertaken. A table of pen-portraits of each of the final participants selected is offered in Appendix 5. In presenting the pen-portrait details, I was conscious that:

> Social researchers need to remove the opportunities for others to infer identities from their data. They may decide to group data in such a way as to disguise identities... or to employ a variety of available measures that seek to impede the detection of identities without inflicting very serious damage to the aggregate dataset... Some damage to analysis is unavoidable in these circumstances, but it needs to be weighed against the potential damage to the sources of data in the absence of such action (Social Research Association, 2003, p.39).

Out of respect for the students – and as a means of managing this ethical concern – I asked all participants to provide the details for their own pen-portrait at the start of the scoping interview. They were asked to offer only those details they felt comfortable with being included in the final thesis. Where participants offered identifying details, I gained their consent to

remove/alter them in such a way as to ensure anonymity. I do not believe this action impacted upon the quality of the datasets gathered or the integrity of the research.

4.34 Conducting the fieldwork

Having arranged with each student a mutually agreeable time, date and space, two semi-structured interviews (i.e. scoping and follow-up) were conducted. All interviews took place on one of the University's campuses, in a specifically designated tutorial room. With participants' express permission, each interview was recorded using a digital audio recording device supplied by the University. Both interviews lasted approximately one hour and were held within three weeks of each other. Prior to the interview, each individual was asked to complete a consent form (see Appendix 6) ensuring they understood and agreed to the terms and conditions under which the interview was to be conducted. Having completed each interview, I transcribed the audio recording almost immediately, in order that I could add my researcher notes and comments fresh from memory. Once I had transcribed the first round of scoping interviews it was time to conduct the follow-up interviews and when they had been completed and transcribed, I began the analysis of each participant's data set. To do this, I used "…the themes from the first case to help orientate the subsequent analysis" (Smith, 2007, p. 73) of the next student and so forth. I found this snowballing effect most effective, in that it helped me to identify repeating patterns whilst also capturing new issues, ideas and experiences methodically. Smith (2007) states that this approach helps to "…respect convergences and divergences in the data – recognising ways in which accounts from participants are similar but also different" (p. 73).

A description of the data analysis process is offered within the following section.

Section 3: Data Analysis

4.4 Introduction to six-step model of IPA

In this section, I draw upon Smith et al.'s (1999) work detailing a six-step model of conducting an IPA of rich data collected from the fieldwork. A summarised account of each step of the process is presented below, including reflections of the practicalities and challenges of the adopted approach.

Step 1: Initial coding

Having conducted each interview, a transcript was typed from the audio recording made. An example transcript from Jenny's scoping interview is presented in Appendix 7. Once this task had been completed, each transcript was read, and then re-read, actively engaging with wider-narratives as they emerged. As suggested by Smith et al. (1999) I highlighted "…the location of richer and more detailed sections, or indeed contradictions and paradoxes" (Smith et al., 2009, p.82) and, from listening carefully to the recordings, made initial exploratory notes as to: a) what words/phrases were chosen to express a thought or memory and b) the tone/inflection in the participant's voice that may have indicated something more or different to what the words were conveying. These 'exploratory notes' were recorded in the transcripts in the right-hand column (see Appendix 7). To help capture these moments accurately, I referred to field notes (written immediately after the interviews ended) and cross-referenced these against wider-consideration of the language being used and the context cited. Additionally, as I had recorded in my field notes significant moments of gesture and/or body language, I was able to cross-reference these against the words recorded to make greater sense of their meaning. Identifying more abstract concepts at this point in the analysis helped to make sense of some of the initial patterns of meaning given in each account (Smith et al., 1999).

Step 2: Identifying emergent themes

To commence the process of identifying emergent themes, I made some initial interpretations from the exploratory notes (created in step 1) whilst reflecting upon key words/phrases that frequently appeared in each transcript. These emergent themes were recorded on transcripts in the left-hand column (see Appendix 7). Having captured the essential quality of what was found in each participant's text, the emergent themes were then summarised and transformed into a final set of sub-themes and main themes for each participant. An example of Tom's

coding table, showing main themes and sub-themes, is given in Appendix 8. Within each coding table is idiographic data (i.e. direct quotes) which helped to preserve each participant's unique voice. Some of these quotes were later used in the final write-up of the findings.

Step 3: Analysing shared themes

As a means of analysing shared themes, Smith et al. (1999) advise that – through personal interaction and interpretation – the researcher seeks "…broad themes reflecting shared aspects of experience for all the participants" (p.203). To support this process, I returned to the transcripts to refine the main themes identified for each participant. These were recorded onto a table (see Appendix 9) in order to help identify clusters of themes which could then be refined further. From this lengthy engagement with the corpus of data, a final set of main themes and associated sub-themes was produced (see Appendix 10).

Step 4: Searching for patterns, connections and tensions

The objective of step 4 in the process is to, "Explore patterns and relationships within and between conceptual groups, thinking about how different themes come together to help us understand further the participants' experiences" (Smith et al., 1999, p.232). Smith et al. (1999) advise that, from "sustained interaction" (Ibid.) with the text, diagrams might be drawn to help "…facilitate the identification of new, implicit or undeveloped relationships between thematic categories" (Ibid.). This was attempted and later rejected, due to a lack of experience and familiarity in creating such representations. I also felt that the pressure to find diagrammatic links and connections forced a logic onto the data that may or may not have been in evidence. Smith et al. (1999) advise alternative methods of exploring the data for patterns e.g. using notes/memos and/or verbalising your thoughts with another researcher. I found that both of these methods were far more useful. Through consciously making the effort to regularly engage in these reflexive activities, I found my understanding of the inter-relationship of the data deepen and my ownership of the interpretation become more confident.

Step 5: Making sense of the data

At this juncture in the process, I took the decision to step back from the data and reflect more holistically on what critical interpretations had already been made and what they collectively meant to the study's primary aim and guiding research questions. Retrospectively, this step in Smith et al.'s (1999) process was the most enlightening yet testing. Finding a theoretical

framework, upon which the corpus of data could be better understood, was both a frustrating and time-consuming process. However, from engaging in an iterative process of reading the transcripts and reflecting upon the findings already generated, I noticed a number of tensions in the data that prompted further exploration. These tensions appeared through conflicting statements reported by students regarding how they perceived themselves, and their learner identity, within the DF exchange. As a means of understanding this phenomenon further, I returned to the literature to research the theoretical field of self-presentation/impression management (Jones and Pitman; 1982; Schlenker and Leary; 1982; Schütz, 1998).

After consideration, I made the decision to use Schütz's (1998) taxonomy of self-presentation styles to make sense of the tensions within the data. I did this by re-reading the findings and highlighting conflicting behaviours/statements that I had previously identified. I then used Schütz's (1998) taxonomy as a means of categorising and explaining these behaviours. It was at this stage in the process that a fifth research question was raised: i.e.

- Is there evidence within the data of students strategically managing their DF experience through the use of self-presentational behaviours? If so, what meaning can be made from this?

Step 6: Writing up the data

The following two chapters (i.e. Findings and Discussion) will represent this final step in the data analysis process i.e. writing-up. Through the selection of extracts from students' talk, the Findings chapter will present main themes, and their associated sub-themes, related to each research question. Following this, the Discussion chapter, will draw upon extant literature to present theoretical argument and conceptualisation of the findings.

4.5 Ethical considerations for the research

The ethical dimension of this research fulfils expectations as published within the 'Guidance of Good Practice in Research Ethics and Governance' (University of Brighton, 2016) as well as the British Educational Research Association's 'Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research' (BERA, 2011). As part of the University's research proposal approval process, the ethics for this research were deemed as presenting a "minimal ethical risk" to participants and was thus categorised at the lowest level of the ethics review system (i.e. Tier 1). However,

regardless of the low risk status of the research, the principles stated in the University's Ethical Policy (University of Brighton, Research Ethics Policy, 2016) were adhered to throughout the process of planning and conducting the research, ensuring it met the "...high standards of ethics and governance and conforms to good practice in those areas" (Ibid.).

Ethical practices included:

- participants being made aware that their participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason
- participants giving their formal consent to take part in the research by signing a consent form (see Appendix 6)
- appropriate arrangements being put into place for the collection, handling and storage of data, with issues of confidentiality, anonymity and privacy being managed
- interview questions being presented in a language suitable for the target audience and worded in a way which was unlikely to cause offence or distress to participants.

Further, within the University of Brighton's Research Policy (2016), a number of potential risks are detailed of which two could apply to the context of this research. These are:

- causing psychological or emotional stress, anxiety or humiliation
- addressing sensitive topics, such as beliefs, painful reflections or traumas, experience of violence or abuse, illness, sexual behaviour, illegal or political behaviour, or people's gender or ethnic status.

As this research explored students' memories and feelings of receiving failed and/or weak academic grades, I acknowledged that this could prompt students to revisit uncomfortable emotions. Thus, at the start of each interview, I reiterated their right to leave at any point or decline to answer any questions. I also reminded the students' that the University's Support and Counselling Services were there to help students manage feelings about their academic and/or personal lives. Contact details were given to each participant in advance in case they became distressed during or after the interview (see Appendix 4).

At the behest of the participants, all interviews took place on the University of Brighton campus where participants studied. This was deemed most convenient for them and least disruptive to

their study and working lives. Students were asked if they had a preference of where they would like the interview to take place and were offered the choice of a library room, a student counselling room, a learning pod and a tutorial room. They were also asked if they had an alternative space they would feel more comfortable in. However, all students opted for the tutorial room, which appeared to be most familiar to them. The tutorial room was booked in advance and, prior to the interview commencing, I tried to make it feel as relaxed and informal as possible (e.g. the furniture was arranged each time to help the participant feel welcomed). I also brought to interviews light refreshments, tissues and some paper and pens. All these measures were helpful in terms of preparation.

4.51 Researching from within

A final consideration in this chapter and linked closely to ethical concern, relates to arguments pertaining to the dichotomy of insider/outsider research and the "…hidden ethical and methodological dilemmas of insiderness" (Labaree, 2002, p. 109). Griffith (1998) offers a standard definition of the insider/outsider researcher as being:

> The insider is 'someone whose biography (gender, race, class, sexual orientation and so on) gives her [sic] a lived familiarity with the group being researched' while the outsider is 'a researcher who does not have any intimate knowledge of the group being researched, prior to entry into the group (p.361).

Personally, I do not subscribe to an over-simplified perspective that the insider/outsider researcher dichotomy exists as "…two mutually exclusive frames of reference" (Olson, 1977, p. 171). Rather, I favour the argument that our identities are always relative, consisting of, "…not a single status, but a status set" (Merton, 1972, p.22). Thus, as Mercer (2007) asserts, insider/outsiderness exists along a permeable continuum, with the two abstractions better considered as end points "…existing in conceptualisation rather than fact" (Christensen and Dahl, 1997, p. 282). With this in mind, I consider elements of 'insiderness' existing within this research due to the fact that I:

- teach within the University where the participants studied
- have familiarity with their course
- have led numerous AFTs, engaging students in DF.

Further, as a doctoral student within the same university as the participants studied, I share some common grounds of the language and policies framing assessment (e.g. GEAR) as well as other regulations that govern learning and research (e.g. UoB Research Ethical Guidelines, 2016).

However, I also believe myself to be an 'outsider' within this research in that:

- I am neither part of their study or social worlds
- the participants all studied on a campus that I do not teach on
- I have not taught or assessed any of the participants, thus I have had no previous contact with them.

Reflecting upon the potential advantages and disadvantages of insider research – or the 'double-edge' as Mercer (2007) refers to it – I understand how my familiarity with participants' lived-experiences can be advantageous in issues of access, stronger rapport, and a deeper, more readily-available frame of shared reference with which to interpret the collected data. Conversely, challenges presented to the insider researcher include having to contend with: a) being too close to the research context (thus reducing the researcher's ability to be objective and critical) and b) the possibility of participants' reluctance to be open and honest.

As a means of mitigating some of the potential negative effects of insider research, I explicitly separated my 'staff' and 'insider researcher' roles. I ensured that:

- participants understood my role and interest in their learning experience was distinctly as a researcher and not as a member of staff at the University
- any personal or academic details to be included in the research were only from what participants had volunteered in the context of the interview
- the content of all interviews was kept confidential at all times.

Regardless of the careful ethical planning and monitoring in place throughout the research process, ethical dilemmas arose during the course of the research that required attention. One incident, recorded in my research journal, stands out as being significant and worthy of further discussion. The dilemma came from an informal conversation I had with one of the tutors who taught on the participants' degree programme. This conversation occurred at a point when I had completed all but one of the interviews. In a friendly exchange with the colleague, he asked

if the students had been "telling on them" and I – as a manager - was "on a secret fact-finding mission". Given my role in the School of Education, it was totally understandable that my research could be perceived as an exercise in covert monitoring of standards. This could, in turn, cause stress and anxiety for some staff. Although I recognised the humour in the statement, I did find myself reflecting on whether I had offered sufficient reassurance to the course team as to the aims and ethics of my research. As a means of addressing this, I wrote a group email to colleagues teaching on the programme, to outline my research in more detail and to reassure them of the purpose of my research.

4.6 Summary

This chapter has offered an account and justification of ways in which the research has been designed to gain rich and detailed accounts regarding students' experiences and perspectives of DF. The following chapter will present the outcomes of the analysis and the themes identified as relating to this central research aim, as well as the associated five research questions.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into five sections to reflect each of the research questions below:

1. What do undergraduate students perceive the nature of dialogic feedback to be?
2. How do undergraduate students understand the purpose of dialogic feedback?
3. How do undergraduate students describe their emotions and feelings relating to dialogic feedback experiences?
4. Within the context of dialogic feedback, how do undergraduate students perceive their relationship with the marking tutor?
5. Is there evidence within the data of students strategically managing their DF experience through the use of self-presentational behaviours? If so, what meaning can be made from this?

Findings relating to the first four questions are presented as main themes and sub-themes. To help give the reader a clear overview of the main themes relating to each research question, these are presented in tabular form at the start of each section. Example extracts from the interviews are used to ensure that the voices of the participants are central to the presentation and analysis of the findings. For each main theme presented, both convergent and divergent findings are offered as a means of ensuring the idiosyncratic aspect of IPA is not lost in the process. In addition, I have included evidence of where conflicting evidence was identified within the data, as well as examples of how prompts and probes were used in the interview to gain deeper insights.

The fifth research question was not analysed through the use of the six-stage IPA approach, thus no main theme/sub-themes were created. Rather, analysis was conducted through identifying and interpreting how self-presentational behaviour existed within the data via the employment of Schütz's (1998) taxonomy of self-presentation behaviours. As a means of justifying my interpretations, extracts have once again been drawn directly from the interviews.

Research question 1: What do undergraduate students understand the nature of dialogic feedback to be?

This section will present findings relating to how participants described the nature of DF. The findings are arranged under the following main and sub-themes.

Main theme	Sub-themes
1. A verbal exchange	1.1 A semi-formal act of speaking and listening
	1.2 A purposeful verbal exchange, focused upon the summative assessment feedback with marking tutor
	1.3 An effective and efficient form of feedback
	1.4 A verbal exchange, located within voluntary assessment feedback tutorials
	1.5 A supportive discussion to address failed and/or weak academic performance

Table 5: Table of main and sub-themes relating to research question 1 - What do students perceive the nature of DF to be?

Main theme: This relates to the first research question which framed student perceptions of DF as being a verbal exchange. Students considered this to be essential in terms of both their perceptions and experiences of the DF phenomenon. Although there was universal agreement amongst the students that a verbal exchange was a defining characteristic of DF, various features and nuances were captured to create five sub-themes as follows.

Sub-theme 1.1: A semi-formal act of speaking and listening
Students' descriptions of the verbal interaction of DF converged around their understanding of it being a semi-formal act of speaking and listening. Debbie summarised a commonly held perspective that: "*You are free to ask questions, raise any issues or thoughts you may have. It's equally important to be listened to. You can ask the tutor questions and they'll give you advice*". Teresa framed her understanding of speaking and listening as: "*…involving some kind of verbal interaction. Hmm…like a conversation or similar*" (Teresa). Other colloquial terms used to explain the act of speaking and listening included: "*chatting*" (Conor), "*talking through*" (Jenny) and "*discussing*" (David). Regardless of the terms used, all students reflected that the nature of speaking and listening was dominated by the process of questioning and answering, and related predominately to the feedback and grade received. To probe students' perspectives

of dialogue that may not involve a verbal exchange, they were asked to give their opinion of alternative perspectives of dialogue e.g. dialogue with self or dialogic reading. Teresa gave a typical response, reinforcing the opinion that dialogue had to provide the opportunity for questions to be answered:

> Teresa: When I think of dialogue, I definitively think of talking to someone, not reading, writing or thinking about something… as you wouldn't get a response from those activities would you?

Conor added an alternative viewpoint as to why dialogue required another person to be present. He reasoned this by stating:

> Conor: You *think* about what the written feedback means but I don't think that is 'dialogue' with yourself, *per se*… Hmm… unless you went on to discuss these reflections with another individual. No. I think dialogue is about talking things through with someone, to gain the information, not just reading or thinking about things on your own. That's more like… reflection?

Conor separates the key learning activities of dialogue and reflection by inferring the former requires engagement with another person whilst the latter is more a solo activity. This was not reflected elsewhere in the data but it offers an interesting perspective of how he understood both activities to be inherently different and the dependency he has upon the tutor's presence for dialogue to happen. Another identified feature within this sub-theme was the semi-formal nature of the DF experienced. Although all expressions describing DF could be interpreted as conveying a convivial sense of informality (e.g. "chatting", "going over" etc.) this was mediated by the focus of the discussion being around "*the biggest thing in students' lives … which is their assessment grades*" (Jenny). Tom explained this in his interview:

> Tom: Tutors always say, "come and chat about your feedback if you are not sure about any of it, but it doesn't *just* feel like a "chat" does it? I mean, you're going to be talking about the most important part of your degree. The marks you get… or worse, the fail you received.

Tom stresses the significance of the dialogue in the AFT, especially if it involves discussing a failed assignment. However, in questioning the tutor's invitation for a "chat", Tom gives insight into the different perspective of what this, seemingly innocuous, offer means to both parties. This division in expectation could be a potential barrier to students attending an AFT.

Sub-theme 1.2: A purposeful verbal exchange, focused upon the summative assessment feedback with marking tutor

Building upon the first sub-theme, the semi-formal verbal exchange was also perceived as inherently purposeful. As Debbie asserted in her interview "*You go to meet your tutor for a reason, it's not just a general catch-up. No. It's more targeted than that. Definitely*". This focus of the DF having a purposeful objective was reflected throughout the data. As David summarised, "*it's a job to be done*". Although findings regarding students' perspectives of the purpose of DF will be detailed later in the chapter, broadly, students booked an AFT as a means of gaining clarification on their feedback and advice as to how to correct their work. As Teresa described, DF was a means of "*… following-up with your tutor on their feedback and discussing the mark you got*". Thus, the findings showed that the tutor's summative feedback and grade awarded framed the purpose of the semi-formal verbal exchange of DF.

In addition, the interview asked students whether they would, in their meeting with their marking tutor, discuss feedback received from other modules. Students were in agreement that tutors would not normally make specific comment upon another tutors' feedback. Further, they expressed that a 'holistic' review of their learning was most likely be held in Personal Academic Tutorial meetings (which occurred once a semester). Thus, the DF experienced with their marking tutor was more specific and restricted to the module taught and the summative judgements made by that tutor. Lisa confirmed this in her interview stating that: "*…tutors are really busy so I don't think they would welcome going through all your modules. Besides, I don't think they would want to make comment on other feedback given by other tutors.*"

I probed this notion further in the interview, asking if their Personal Academic Tutor could also lead the DF of the marking tutor, using their original feedback (for example). It became clear that students held strong opinions that the marking tutor was essential in the process of leading the DF on marked work. Jenny offered a common justification for this response by stating that the "*…questions you have, can only really be answered by your tutor as they wrote the feedback, gave the grade and know the standard of the work. They'll give you the straight forward advice you want*". Matt explained his perspective, drawing upon concerns of quality assurance and validity:

> Matt: Hmm… I'm not sure I would think of dialogic feedback to be something that anyone could do… like your friends or another tutor on the course… as your [marking] tutor would need to explain why they had written what they had in the feedback and

answer any questions you may have regarding their grading etcetera. I'm not sure how fair that would be…

Through the rejection of the proposal that other tutors could interpret the assignment feedback in ways to support their learning, there is evidence of students' dependency and reliance upon their marking tutor. The findings also show a more covert expectation on the part of the student which is driven by discourses of tutor accountability, with the DF exchange being an opportunity for the students – via the tutor's verbal justification of grade and feedback – to evaluate and validate the fairness of the assessment process. Thus, for the students, this forms an important purpose of the DF experience.

Sub-theme 1.3: An effective and efficient form of feedback

Students enthusiastically reported the usefulness of their DF experience, collectively agreeing that it was an effective and efficient form of feedback. Within his interview, Matt offered insight into this perspective:

> Researcher: You say the tutorial is 'better' than just reading your tutor's feedback, but why is that?
> Matt: When you sit with your tutor, face-to-face, and they talk through your work… you can just… like in your mind… err… understand it there and then… It's immediate. Yeah. You can address all the errors and understand them in 'live-time' so to speak.
> Researcher: How is that an advantage?
> Matt: It's like… it's done and dusted. I usually scan read my written feedback too… so I am not always one hundred percent confident I have really understood it.

Significantly, students expressed that gaining such "*immediate*" (Matt) advice regarding their feedback was one of the most valuable features of DF in making it both effective and efficient. Matt's description of this process as being in "*live-time*" so that errors can swiftly be "*done and dusted*" offered insight into how students perceived the DF experience as time-effective. David concurred with Matt's perspective, stating that "*…the beauty of talking things through with your tutor is that they get sorted out. You are then free to get on with your new modules*". In his interview, Conor explained that through DF "*…issues can be sorted out there and then*". Debbie added a further benefit of DF being that students could gain "*…quick, on the spot advice*". These findings differentiated DF from other forms of feedback students had experienced on the course e.g. written feedback and/or receiving a numerical grade. As David explained, within those forms of feedback "*…you have no chance to come back to the tutor or discuss what they had written about your work*" (David).

Students confirmed that, in their experience of DF, it was always a process of gaining feedback-on-feedback. As Tom explained, it was a process of "…*going over and checking understanding of the feedback given on your assignment*" (Tom). Lisa confirmed that DF was never used as the primary form of feedback. She explained "*You always have received your written feedback first. You don't just get your tutor talking through your feedback without the assessment sheet in front of you*". Probing this further, students were asked how they would feel about receiving no written feedback on their work, just a one-to-one meeting with their tutor.

Although the idea of incorporating DF into all modules, for all students, was enthusiastically welcomed, participants stated that they would still want to receive written feedback from their tutor to accompany the DF meeting. Jenny's extract summarises this perspective:

> Jenny: I can't explain it really. I guess by having the written feedback you have something… permanent. To sort of hold. Err… I mean a reminder. You can go back to it over and over again if you want. You can't do that with dialogic feedback though. So both would be best. That or the tutor could video the DF meeting I suppose?

Jenny's use of the term 'to hold' here is interesting, considering the written feedback students receive is electronic. Here, she expresses a desire to have the tutor's feedback readily accessible as a means of reassurance.

Sub-theme 1.4: A verbal exchange, located within voluntary assessment feedback tutorials
Having understood some defining features of the nature of DF, students were asked when and where they had experienced it on their course. Findings converged around this question to show that all participants had experienced DF within assessment feedback tutorials (AFT) and not more generally on their course. Jenny offered a collective view that, "…*you don't speak with your tutors about your assignments on a one-to-one before they get submitted. It would only really be after getting your grade you would meet with them…if you failed or did badly that is*". Teresa supported Jenny's viewpoint, adding that large group sizes, coupled with no opportunity to show draft assignments to their tutors, restrict DF opportunities.

> Teresa: We are usually taught in quite large groups so we don't tend to get to chat to our tutor about our progress in normal class-time. Also, it is not normal for the tutor to know progress on your essay, that's going to be submitted at the end of the module…
> Researcher: Why is that? Can you explain?

Teresa: We don't show drafts [assignments] to our tutors and, to date, I've not had any formative assessments either. So, my tutor wouldn't have had opportunity to give me any dialogic feedback, as they hadn't seen any of my work.

Students reported that AFTs were conducted around "*an open agenda*" (Lisa) but mainly guided by the tutor who: i) clarified their summative feedback; ii) explained annotations included in the script and iii) justified the final grade awarded. As AFTs were not included as part of the daily curriculum, Tom described them as "*bolt-on*", meaning an additional mechanism of support provided by the marking tutor. AFTs were generally understood to be voluntary. However, a number of students shared additional insight, including Conor who said that there was an "*unwritten expectation*" that students would take up the offer. Lisa added to this, stating "*It's good to have the option of seeing your tutor if things have gone badly. That said, I'm not sure it would go down well if you didn't bother… if you know what I mean*". Teresa also reflected on the notion of volunteering to attend an AFT explaining that it was "*…acting like an adult and taking responsibility*".

Students explained that they usually requested an AFT on receipt of their grade and written summative feedback or "*…within a week or two of receiving the feedback so it is still relevant and fresh in your mind*" (Tom). As such, the experiences of AFTs (as students discussed in their interviews) happened mainly at two points in the year i.e. in February (at the end of semester one) and May (at the end of semester 2). This has implications for the students, as AFTs would have occurred before the summer course examination board had met. Hence, students would have been unaware as to whether: a) their assignment would be required for re-submission or b) their future place on the course was secure. These findings indicate a potential conflict within the process of students deciding whether or not to book an AFT. Tension between not knowing whether they are going to be required to re-submit the assignment versus the institutional pressure and expectation for them to book a meeting may cause conflict for students. Here, I argue that the primary 'purpose' of the AFT (i.e. to gain corrections to resolve issues on their assignment) thus becomes somewhat blurred, leaving the student to make some strategic decisions as to the value, or indeed need, to book a tutorial.

Sub-theme 1.5: A supportive verbal interaction to discuss failed and/or weak academic assessment performance

A further critical feature regarding the inherent nature of DF, related to who would attend an AFT and why. It has been established thus far that students had experienced DF within AFTs and these tutorials were offered to support students understanding their summative feedback and grade. However, although there is no University policy restricting who can request an AFT, data converged around the notion that students would only request one if they had received:

- a failed assessment grade (i.e. below 40%)
- a low assessment grade, close to the pass/fail threshold of 40%.

Less common reasons cited included if students had received:

- feedback and/or grade they were dissatisfied with
- feedback and/or grade they felt to be unfair or incorrect.

Critically, AFTs were – in participants' experience – never requested to discuss satisfactory or very good grades. Similarly, students had not experienced booking an AFT to discuss progressing their grades from "*good to very good*" (Conor). Conor explains this accepted practice:

> Conor: Hmm. No, I've never heard of anyone going to their tutor with a good grade and asking ways in which it could go from, say, good to very good. No. It's more that you would only ever book a meeting if things had gone badly and you need to get things straightened out.

This contextual information offered by Conor is critical in understanding students' perspectives of the nature of DF and indicates the likely quality and content of the verbal exchange. These findings prompt wider questions regarding the learning culture in HE and the way in which support is conceived, particularly for those students succeeding and/or in need of challenge.

Findings relating to the second research question will now be presented in the following section.

Research question 2: How do undergraduate students understand the purpose of dialogic feedback?

This section presents findings relating to the question of how participants understood the purpose of DF. The findings will be considered in the context of the three sub-themes, outlined in the table below.

Main theme	Sub-themes
2. To improve future grades and prevent further failure	2.1 To understand the right way of knowing and doing
	2.2 To correct poor academic practice
	2.3 To gain support for weak subject knowledge

Table 6: Table of main theme and sub-themes relating to research question 2 - How do students understand the purpose of DF?

Main theme: Emerging from the data, students understood the purpose of DF to be to improve future grades and prevent further assignment failures. Thus, the focus on future academic performance, framed students' talk of the purpose of DF. It also underpinned their reasoning as to why they had chosen to engage with it. Findings relating to the three sub-themes are discussed below.

Sub-theme 2.1: To understand the right way of knowing and doing

Participants articulated their assignment performances in binary terms, including for example: "right/wrong", "good/bad", "pass/fail" and "correct/incorrect". This finding offers insight into how students evaluated their own learning in light of the grade they received. Further, the AFT was not perceived as a place to focus upon positives but rather on the corrections their tutor could offer. Matt reflected upon this point and explained: "*When you fail an assignment, you don't wanna waste time talking about the… err… 32% of the paper that was 'satisfactory'. It's the 68% you got wrong that you really want to understand*". Matt's viewpoint reinforces students' tacit understanding that the AFT, and therefore DF, was only for students who had failed their assignment.

Jenny stated that a key purpose of the AFT was:

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Jenny: To put into context, the grade you got and how 'good' or bad' it was. When the tutor explains why they gave you the mark you can better understand it from their perspective. You know…what *they* had wanted to see [in the assignment] and what you had left out or got wrong. You get to know your tutor's expectations.

Although the University's grading guidelines and modular assessment criteria are published for all modules, there was little reference to either of these documents being used to help students in writing their assessed work. Rather, students referred to "*tutor's expectations*" (Tom) and/or what the "*…tutor had expected to see in the assignment*" (Jenny). Thus, the AFT offered students, retrospectively, the opportunity to know what their tutor had expected to read in their assignment. In doing so, students were able to make connections between the gap in the quality of their assignment and what they "*…should have written*" (Lisa). These findings demonstrate the way in which students understood assessment as needing to meet, and not diverge away from, their tutor's expectations. Teresa highlighted this in her talk: "*You need to get it right in terms of what the tutor is looking for and that's where talking helps. You are definitively more confident when you know exactly what it is your tutor expects to see in the assignment. It's when that gets all fudged it can go wrong*". For Matt, gaining such clarification via DF also helped to make academic standards and expectations more explicit and "real".

Matt: I want to know from them [tutors] – from the start – what they were expecting in terms of the standard etcetera. That's why the meetings are so useful. Hmmm, yeah, you really can see it, from them telling you where you went wrong against what they wanted to see. When they explain this, in a tutorial, you can then see it more easily in your own work. It's like… it's more real. It's easier than having to interpret these from written comments, I think.

For Matt, having a face-to-face meeting with his tutors, helped to clarify these expectations and reduced the need for him to interpret – often intangible – written feedback comments: "*You often get feedback statements like 'look deeper into this' or 'try to unpack that more' but I'm not sure what this means in reality. So I tend to ignore them*" (Matt).

However, within Lisa's interview, she drew upon the timeliness of gaining such critical insight by recalling memories of how she had received formative advice on her essays whilst studying at Sixth Form College. She explained that:

Lisa: At my sixth form, we were allowed to submit a draft essay to the tutor before submitting it finally. The tutor would mark the draft and then you could meet with her

to talk through what they thought of it. This was definitely the most helpful way to understand whether your work was on track or not. Plus, it made the feedback much more important and 'real'. I did think the tutorial [AFT] I had had after getting my essay back was a bit like shutting the door once the horse had bolted. It was useful but not as useful as what I had previously experienced.

Lisa's account here raises further questions as to the lack of formative feedback students reported in their interviews. Further, it is apparent that although DF was deemed a valuable experience, it was ultimately retrospective, thus reducing its potential in terms of perceived usefulness. Explaining this further, Lisa's observation (above) reflects a common perception that formative feedback is most useful when received prior to a submission. That way, tutors' suggested improvements can be incorporated directly into the assignment, improving its quality and potential for a higher grade. Within the AFT, the formative advice was understood as being more general, to be applied to future assignments.

Students also expressed that DF afforded opportunity to understand their tutors' rationale for the percentage grade awarded. In discussing this point, participants showed a high degree of deference and acceptance of their tutors' authority, stating that they "…*knew best*" (Conor) due to them being "…*experienced experts in their field*" (Matt). Students shared a common concern that, in discussing the grade awarded by the tutor, they did not wish to appear to be challenging the judgement or accuracy of the marking. As Debbie explained: "*I was feeling lost. I wanted to ask the tutor why I got the bad mark but I felt like, hmm, it would be a bit of a cheek. I mean, who am I? I decided in the end not to. I didn't want to be labelled a trouble-maker or seem like I was complaining*".

A key outcome of the AFT was that students felt better positioned to understand their tutor's feedback and rationale for the grade received (even if this was not always something they agreed with). Students' lack of reference to published guidelines/advice offers further evidence of the central importance that students placed upon the tutor's expectations, in framing their response to assignments. However, as the AFT offers such insight retrospectively, this could account for students' strong support for the practice of gaining formative feedback on draft assignments. I argue that the apparent lack of confidence in the student body is indicative of tutor-dependency models of teaching and learning, where students have little self-belief in their own interpretative skills and judgements.

Sub-theme 2.2: To correct poor academic practice

The data indicated that participants considered the prime purpose of DF was to address corrections, errors and mistakes. Analysis revealed two distinct categories identified by students - poor academic practice and weak subject knowledge. Findings relating to poor academic practice will be addressed below and findings relating to weak subject knowledge will be discussed in sub-theme 3.

Students associated poor academic practice with different types of errors "*…commonly found in tutor's feedback*" (Debbie), including: a) careless sentence construction: b) poor essay layout; c) lack of coherence; d) issues with referencing and incorrect spellings and grammar. David summarised poor academic practice as:

> David: All the silly mistakes you make… like… how you structured the essay– or didn't [laughs]. Whether all of the assessment criteria were met, how you presented your assignment and hmm... all the other stuff like spellings and references layout etcetera.

Although students often referred to poor academic practice as "*silly*" (David), "*minor*" (Tom) and/or "*stupid*" (Lisa) mistakes, they also reported these as being highly important, believing such errors to have a significant impact on the overall grade judgement from the tutor. As Tom stated, "*…when you go through all the minor mistakes with your tutor, you can see the errors you made and where you had gone wrong and what led to them [tutors] failing you. They [poor academic performance] all add-up don't they*?" Thus, students saw great value in having the opportunity to understand their poor academic practice from the perspective of their marking tutors. Participants also expressed that – in their experience – the majority of the tutors' written feedback related to poor academic practice, and thus, the majority of time spent within the DF focused upon discussing this aspect.

Participants' descriptions of ways in which poor academic practice was identified and rectified within the DF were broadly similar across the data sets. Frequently, students commented that their tutor systematically: a) led them through annotations made on the script; b) reviewed the feedback comments they had given and c) checked they understood both the annotations and written feedback comments. Debbie outlined the process as follows: "*Your tutor will usually read through their annotations and comments, and stop to explain them if you are in any doubt*

or you don't understand them. Hmm… Like a check-list where you take loads of notes. Yeah. I'd say this is what most commonly happens in the tutorial".

When students were asked how they felt about this aspect of DF, they generally responded positively seeing the direct usefulness of "*becoming better essay writers*" (Teresa). Jenny shared a personal insight not raised elsewhere in the data. For Jenny, focusing upon poor academic practice felt less stressful and more manageable than discussing aspects of weak subject knowledge. She explained her feelings in the following extract.

> Jenny: I panicked when my tutor began to ask some of the question about my reading and understanding of the topic of the essay. So yeah it was easier when we focused more upon the obvious stuff like the layout of the essay and the wrong references I'd done. I then felt under less pressure and like I had to know everything.

Sub-theme 2.3: To gain support for weak subject knowledge

As previously stated, students also understood the purpose of DF as an opportunity to gain support for weak subject knowledge. Students believed that issues relating to this aspect were significantly more difficult to resolve than those encountered in poor academic practice. The terms used to express this perspective included: "*bigger*" (Tom), "*deeper*" (Lisa) and "*more serious*" (Jenny). Conor explained the process of supporting weak subject knowledge as "…*untangling the complex theories and deeper stuff we have to cover on our course*". Debbie shared a memory of how the DF had helped her in the process of clarifying and closing subject knowledge gaps:

> Debbie: We were all really struggling with understanding some of the theories relating to equality [aside] that we had been introduced to in one module. It just went over my head. I knew I had still got it wrong when I wrote my essay and, to be fair, it was raised in the tutor's feedback. So, in the tutorial, I had a chance to go through it in more detail… quietly and calmly with my tutor. Yeah, thinking back, it really helped that the tutor took the time to explain it to me in a one-to-one situation.

Conor reflected Debbie's observation that the one-to-one context of the AFT created a private space where the student and tutor could work through complex epistemological issues:

> Researcher: Why do you find the AFT a helpful space? Can you elaborate please?
> Conor: It's definitely helpful as you can discuss, in a meeting with the tutor, things you just don't get, but didn't have the opportunity to ask in the classroom. Especially when it relates to, say, someone's theory or a bit of reading you were expected to understand.

Conor went on to explain that the 'opportunity to ask questions' in the classroom was often restricted due to: a) the learning context (i.e. small reading groups or seminar sessions were more suitable for asking questions than larger, keynote presentations); b) the tutor's teaching style (i.e. some tutors appeared more receptive to taking questions from students during a lecture) and c) the numbers and combination of students being taught in a session (i.e. within full cohort lectures and/or those teaching episodes where students from other courses might be in attendance, raising questions would be less likely). Several other participants concurred with the perspective that the focused and personalised context of the AFT, was often a more comfortable environment in which they could ask their tutor's questions about subject-knowledge. For example, Jenny pointed out that, "*In the classroom, it's often too embarrassing to stop the tutor mid-flow. I just don't have the confidence to raise my hand*". She added that: "*Although no-one wants to fail an assignment and have to have an AFT, the support you get in the tutorial can be a bit of a silver-lining, if that makes sense?*"

Analysis of this sub-theme raised a further perspective that did not appear elsewhere in the data. In Tom's interview, he perceived addressing weak subject knowledge as being critical to both his credibility as a degree student, as well as his membership within the learning community. Tom explained this in the following extract:

> Tom: When you don't understand some of the bigger things on the course, then you feel like you are somehow… hmm… maybe of not worthy of being on the course. Like, an odd one out.
> Researcher: Can you explain what you mean?
> Tom: Yeah. I think you get worried that others understand things you don't – so you'll be left behind and won't be able to do so well in other modules. Also, the course is designed to build upon what you have done before so if you don't understand, say, learning theory in year one then how will you be expected to understand it in year two?
> Researcher: I see that…
> Tom: I mean you can hardly say you have a degree in education and not understand a learning theory. It sort of makes a mockery…

A concluding point, relating to both poor academic practice and weak subject knowledge, was that students judged the overall effectiveness of their DF experience directly against the degree to which the corrective guidance and advice attained could be applied both to the failed assignment being discussed, as well as to future assignments. Further, students also expressed a view that the tutors – who were deemed most effective in giving DF – were ones who could convey corrections in easy, direct and accessible ways:

David: You want the tutor to really say it as it is. You know? You want clear advice that will help you move on and you want it put in ways that you can understand so that you can use it. For me, that's when the meeting really helps.

Research question 3: How do undergraduate students describe their emotions and feelings relating to dialogic feedback experiences?

Three sub-themes, associated with the third research question, were generated from the data. These sub-themes related to the affective dimensions of: feelings of exposure; anxiety and apathy (see table below).

Main theme	Sub-themes
3. Feelings of low self-confidence	3.1 Feelings of exposure
	3.2 Feelings of anxiety
	3.3 Feelings of apathy

Table 7: Table of main theme and sub-themes relating to research question 3 – How do undergraduate students describe their emotions and feelings relating to DF experience?

Main theme: Low self-confidence is reflective of how negative emotions and feelings significantly impact upon the way in which students perceive both their learning progress, as well as themselves as learners. Emotions relating to being judged (i.e. exposure); stress (i.e. anxiety) and low motivation (i.e. apathy) were pervasive across all transcripts and related to a combination of factors including receiving the failed grade, anticipating speaking with their marking tutor, and experiencing the AFT itself.

Sub-theme 3.1: Feelings of exposure
Although the data presented a positive evaluation of students' experiences of DF, the decision to meet with their marking tutor to discuss a failed piece of work was not without its challenges. These centred primarily on students feeling "*awkward*" (Matt), "*uncomfortable*" (Teresa) and "*embarrassed*" (David) at the thought of having to sit in a face-to-face meeting with their marking tutor. For some of the participants, the thought of attending an AFT prompted uneasy memories of their school days: "*I just felt like I was back at school and having to see the teacher. I know it's not really like that… but I couldn't shake off that same feeling when I was walking into his [tutor's] office. I expected to read SEE ME! at the bottom of my paper [laughs]. The shame!*" (Teresa). Tom captured this feeling by stating that: "*It's quite exposing isn't it? Sitting with your tutor, discussing a failed essay or assignment. It's stressful. You do feel a bit under the spotlight!*"

Three perspectives relating to 'feelings of exposure' were found within the data. These included: a) the unfamiliarity with the DF experience; b) being scrutinised by their marking tutor and c) concern about how others (e.g. peers and family/friends) may judge them. I will now present findings for each of these perspectives.

First, feelings of exposure due to the unfamiliarity with the DF experience, were summarised by Debbie who explained that it caused her to "…*worry, not knowing what it [AFT] was going to be like, what was going to happen and what the tutor wanted me to do*". This was further explained by Conor who stated that in his first year of study the DF was the first time he had sat and talked with a tutor in a one-to-one context: "*It was at the end of the first semester that I went for the feedback tutorial [AFT] and up until that point, I'd not sat down with a tutor and talked in a tutorial situation. I think that didn't really help with my nerves if I'm honest. Especially as you were talking about the work you failed. Yeah – it was intense.*"

Second, participants raised a number of anxieties about the AFT being an opportunity for the marking tutor to scrutinise their work for the second time. This was expressed in a number of different ways.

> Lisa: It's the intensity of it all really… and the not knowing what they [tutors] are going to talk about. You just don't wanna be judged again – for the second time – I felt myself sitting and smiling a lot at the tutor in the hope it wasn't going to be too painful [laughs]!
> Researcher: Did that work?
> Lisa: Kind of [laughs]. I remember trying to point out some of the good things I had done. You know, to keep it positive and show the tutor that I was taking it all in.

Teresa also described how she nearly decided against attending her AFT because of her concern at being exposed by her marking tutor as a "slacking" student:

> Teresa: I got myself in a real state before I went to see the tutor. The essay I wrote was embarrassing and I thought she [tutor] was going to call me out on it. She didn't. She was really kind. But I nearly didn't go because I was too stressed beforehand. I thought she was going to ask me all sorts [of questions], including if I had really put maximum effort into the essay… which… honestly… I, stupidly, hadn't. I was slacking at that point you see.

Adding to her concern of being scrutinised, Debbie recounted the high stress levels that led to feeling that the AFT might expose serious errors in her work, including academic misconduct

(i.e. in academic referencing). Debbie describes her irrational 'guilt complex' in the following extract.

> Debbie: Everyone knows what it's like when you show a piece of work to your tutor. You suddenly think 'did I reference that right'? 'Will they find something, hmm, like copying in my work? I think I have a natural guilt complex.
> Researcher: Did that impact on the dialogic feedback – do you remember?
> Debbie: Yep – I clammed up. I just found myself panicking that I was going to say something wrong and set myself up. Silly I know but I think it was the stress of it all.

Although Debbie had not engaged in any form of academic misconduct, her heightened feelings of being exposed as a cheat resulted in feelings of guilt and anxiety, hindering her participation in the DF.

Third, the analysis showed students concern about how others (e.g. peers and/or family/friends) may judge them. Teresa expressed not wanting to share her failure with friends on the course due to the shame and embarrassment she felt. This, she worried, would lead to isolation from her peer group: "*It's so silly, but back then, I really thought if everyone knew I'd failed then I would be sort of 'out of the group'. It's very competitive you see*". Similar issues of rejection and isolation were identified in a number of other interviews. Jenny highlighted a specific concern about not wanting to be labelled as a "struggling student" as she might then be rejected from her peer group in the selection of group tasks.

> Jenny: It sounds bad but I didn't tell my friends on the course that I had failed the assessment as we had two group projects coming up and I didn't want them to think that I was a struggling student who might bring their marks down. They know me now – so it would never happen.

Some participants perceived the act of meeting with a tutor to discuss a weak/failed grade exposed them to the potential disappointment and criticism of family and friends. As Tom described, he perceived the AFT as, "…*an embarrassing public signal of failure*". For Tom, engaging in an AFT confirmed he was not coping with the demands of study. David also linked DF to a feeling of shame at not passing an assignment, something he strongly expressed he did not want shared outside the context of the AFT. Conor was quite clear that he wanted to keep his "*failures to himself*" as a means of not worrying his mother unnecessarily. Conor relayed that his mother would not understand the rules and regulations of the University, which would in turn lead to frustrated arguments between the two of them. Matt expressed that he did not

want "*to let his parents down*", as they were financially supporting him through his three years of degree study. Expressing feelings of guilt, he did not want his parents to think he was "…*flitting away his time and their money*".

Jenny, however, diverged from these views stating that she had actively shared with her young daughter opportunities she had taken to seek support from her tutor: "*I tell my daughter every day that, if she is stuck at school then she needs to tell the teacher. So, I guess I feel like the pressure is on for me to be a bit of a role model. I always tell her if I've been to speak with my tutor*". For Jenny, the act of engaging in DF was not something to be ashamed of. On the contrary, it acted as a point of learning and bonding for herself and her daughter.

Finally, Lisa expressed that she did not want her failure to be known more widely across the course team of tutors, as she wanted to protect her reputation on the course, in order that she received the necessary support from her tutors when applying for future study/professional training. Lisa offers insight into this dilemma in the following extract:

> Lisa: I hadn't failed anything before and so it [failed assignment] came as a complete shock. I wouldn't say I was angry about the fail but I did feel that somehow I would be looked at by tutors… hmm… differently. I certainly didn't like that feeling. Hmm… Maybe I *was* a little bit angry… at how I couldn't change that feeling or… able to change anything. It did make the meeting with the tutor a bit awkward, especially as I needed a strong academic profile to go onto do my Masters.

The sudden change in what was an otherwise unblemished academic profile, resulted in Lisa's sense of pride being damaged. Her frustration and anger that the failed mark – which she could not change – would always appear on her academic record is evident. She was concerned that her possible change of academic profile would be used by tutors to form judgements about her and her ability. Lisa's feelings associated with her damaged reputation were not addressed prior to the AFT, thus making the DF experience more awkward.

Findings within this section offer insight into how the unfamiliarity of the DF heightened students' concern about what they anticipated from the AFT and how they were expected to perform within it. I posit here that the high levels of anxiety that students reported feeling in the lead up to the AFT, as well as during the DF itself, resulted in them questioning both themselves as well as the tutor's 'true' rationale behind the tutorial. Finally, as means of managing their feelings of shame and embarrassment, students elected to hide their failure from

those close to them. These findings further reinforce a view of learning that is driven by performative outcomes and summative judgement and helps to explain the binary terms in which students described their success or failure in their assessment.

Sub-theme 3.2: Feelings of anxiety

All participants reported questioning their academic capability on receiving their failed graded paper. The grade which students were awarded, significantly impacted on their feelings of confidence and self-worth. As Teresa recounted, "*Everyone always looks at their grade first and your heart is, like, going fast. You just wanna see it's passed. When it doesn't… it feels like a bit of a meltdown moment and it's hard to take in any of the tutor's written comments after that*". Debbie also noted the same feelings, stressing in her interview that: "*The grade says it all really doesn't it? You pass, you're happy. You fail… you begin to question all sorts as to whether you had made the right decision to come to university*". Thus, for students, the grade acted as a powerful delineator, indicating more than just the level of success within that one assignment. Here, the grade acted as a catalyst for students to question whether they were "…*cut out for university*" (Conor). Teresa's account was not usual in this respect:

> Teresa: I honestly felt like I was not good enough or clever enough to be on the course. I was so stressed. Especially as everyone else had 'apparently' [rolls eyes] passed – really easily [sarcastic]. I just felt like leaving if I am honest and nearly convinced myself to do so… had I not spoken with my tutor… who really gave me a world of support at that moment in time and really reassured me I was clever enough. She helped me unpick the feedback with a positive frame of mind.

There was universal agreement amongst participants that talking through feedback commentary with their marking tutor, had significantly helped to reassure them of their academic potential and decision to remain on the course. Lisa's evaluation of an AFT she attended being "…*better than counselling*" was a critical insight into how some students blurred the 'academic/pastoral' lines of their tutor's role and the principal objective of the AFT.

There were a number of extracts within the findings which were attributed to the core emotions of stress and anxiety in relation to their poor academic performance, with participants exhibiting strong feelings of self-condemnation and self-devaluation.

> Jenny: I really flunked out on one essay, in the first term of being here. The feedback was so bad I couldn't bring myself to read it especially as I knew all the stupid mistakes

I had made. I was really stressed as it was so cringe seeing all my tutor's comments. I was feeling like I was depressed when I went to see my tutor. I couldn't see the light at the end of the tunnel.

For Jenny, she makes-sense of her failed module as a "*self-fulfilling prophecy*". She explained that, prior to studying at degree-level, she had serious doubts about whether she was "*academic enough*". Jenny shared her feelings of low self-esteem with her tutor and drew upon her status, as a mature student, to explain why the DF seemed to be the most appropriate form of support at the time.

Jenny: I think being a mature student, I just needed to talk to another person [tutor] more my own age to get a sense of perspective and to know they would understand my doubts about my own ability and help me understand that through my own writing.

The significant levels of anxiety students felt in receiving a low/failed grade and attending an AFT was commonly found within all interviews. The percentage grade received on their marked assignment acted as the most important point of reference for students when judging the level of their assignment success or failure. Thus, when students talked of their low/failed grade, it was perceived synonymously as the catalyst for their feelings of anxiety. This was reinforced by the grade being understood as a non-negotiable, hierarchical categoriser that positioned them amongst their peers. Reference in the data to suggest that the written commentary caused similar feelings of anxiety was negligible.

Sub-theme 3.3: Feelings of apathy

Students expressed strong emotions relating to feelings of apathy or being 'stuck' at various points within their study, most commonly in or around the point of receiving their failed/weak grade. This was described in a number of ways, including: "*feeling clueless*" (David) "*drifting off*" (Jenny), "*not knowing which way to turn*" (Conor) and "*sapped of energy*" (Lisa). The findings showed how apathy, leading to low levels of motivation, could pervade students' study and social lives, often resulting in them failing to engage with their learning and university-life. Jenny outlined some of these feelings in her interview.

Jenny: I think you go either way when you get a bad grade. You can either think… 'I need to sort this out' or, more usually for me, you want to shut the world away for a bit and bury your head. I didn't even want to come into lectures or even go to the library. That's when you need to talk through the assessment with a tutor. So they [tutors] can make sure you don't end up chucking it all away and drifting off.

When asked how DF addresses such feelings, students reported that – via the DF – their tutors re-engaged them to look more positively at their work. This critical strategy, of tutors helping the student to understand the failed assignment as a "*pint half full, not empty*" (David) was a central expectation of the role of the DF. Motivationally, such a realignment of expectation helped students to "*…know that completing the course was do-able*" (Matt). This was an especially powerful message if it came directly from the tutor. David recounted in his interview, how he began not to care about his degree after getting his failed mark. His sense of desolation is apparent and, although he states he looked for "*other options*", it is not clear how much of this was bravado to protect his feelings further.

> David: Yeah. I thought, fine, if I'm not up to it then I'll jump before I'm pushed. Other options, you know. But yeah… It was all just silliness really. But I did, for a while, not care about university and lost sight a bit as to why I was there and how much I needed it for the future. Funny really. I am bit like that. I can just – jump ship if things aren't going to plan…

A further reason for students feeling apathetic and de-motivated related to what I have termed the 'effort-grade' dilemma. Within this dilemma, students expressed frustration that the effort they put into an assignment did not equate to the grade they had received or were hoping for. Paradoxically, some students felt that the more effort they put into an assignment the greater the chances of receiving a lower grade from their tutor. The impact of this was that students felt de-motivated, unsure of what they could "*do more of*" (Jenny) to affect change. As Conor stated:

> Conor: I worked out my grade average, at the end of the first semester, meant I was going to fail. And I remember thinking, even if I do go to speak with the tutor and do more reading in the library etcetera, it won't make any different. I guess it left me feeling like I was in quicksand.
> Researcher: How was that feeling?
> Conor: Like… the more I seemed to be putting in, the worse grades I seemed to be getting. I needed to see that my grades were improving….and they weren't. I think I switched off a little, which is why I went to speak to my tutor.
> Researcher: How was that?
> Conor: Useful… she reminded me that effort doesn't always equal grade which of course I knew but… it helped just to let off steam a bit.

In David's interview, the effort-grade dilemma appeared to have greater negative impact than receiving a failed mark, which he could accept and account for.

> David: It just didn't seem fair. I had spent literally weeks on my presentation assignment and all I got was err… 43%. Just a pass! I was more disappointed with that mark, believe it or not, than the fails I got in the first term as at least for those I could

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see why. I was ready to leave if I am honest as I couldn't see the point. It didn't seem to matter how hard I tried…

Teresa expressed similar frustration with the way in which she perceived her effort as not being rewarded by a higher grade.

Teresa: It doesn't make sense to me sometimes. Like; the essays I've worked the hardest in, I don't always score my best marks. I don't think the tutor always takes this into account which is frustrating and a bit err… demoralising. Especially when others seem to do so little. My tutor however did help me to see the positives in my work and that did help me feel less cross.

Here, Teresa suggests that the amount of effort put into creating assignments should be recognised by tutors as a means of making the grading of papers fairer, however, she does not offer suggestion of how this could happen in reality. In expressing her thoughts, she demonstrates frustration that effort does not automatically equal high academic performance. Connecting these findings to ones previously discussed, it is demonstrated here how students use the DF to gain understanding of the tutors' expectations and grades as well as to help them with issues of motivation.

Reflecting the findings presented in the previous sub-theme (i.e. Feelings of anxiety) students here indicated that the grade awarded plays a similar pivotal role in influencing their feelings of either high or low motivation. Students over-reliance on using the grade to contextualise performance reduces their ability to make more balanced evaluations of strengths and weaknesses in their work, thus leading to feelings of apathy and 'being stuck'. Findings showed that the DF experience afforded students the opportunity to secure their tutors' guidance, thus helping them to frame their failure in more productive ways.

Research question 4: Within the context of dialogic feedback, how do undergraduate students perceive their relationship with the marking tutor?

In this section, findings relating to the fourth research question will be presented. The analysis revealed the following main theme and sub-themes.

Main themes	Sub-themes
4. Students' perceptions of students as novice and tutors as expert.	4.1 Tutor leading the feedback
	4.2 Building students' self-belief through trusting relationships
	4.3 Seeking reassurance through pastoral support
	4.4 Getting motivated

Table 8: Table of main theme and sub-themes relating to research question 4 – Within the context of dialogic feedback, how do undergraduate students perceive their relationship with the marking tutor?

Main theme: Students' perceived their relationship with the marking tutor as being akin to that of novice/expert. Their reference and deference to their tutor's experience, authority and expertise connected the four sub-themes. It also shaped students' accounts of the subordinate, often passive, roles they took in the AFT – reflecting the way in which they understood their novice position in the relationship. This key finding will be explored further in the discussion of the four sub-themes below.

Sub-theme 4.1: Tutor leading the feedback

There was a widespread expectation by students that the marking tutor would take the lead regarding the direction and content of the DF. Linked closely to students' perception that the fundamental purpose of DF was to gain advice on academic performance, students believed that the tutor was "*best positioned*" (David) to guide them through the feedback highlighted in their assignment. David continued to explain this viewpoint by stating that "*…it was their [marking tutor's] feedback and, as that is what usually forms the basis for the discussion, it makes sense that they lead it*". Thus, David indicated that he perceives the feedback belonging to the tutor and not to himself. Similar perspectives were found frequently across most of the transcripts.

During the interviews, I probed students' views as to how they reconciled their role as independent learners, with the tutor taking such a dominant lead in the AFT. Jenny explained that, as the purpose of the AFT was to improve future academic performance, it was necessary to hear the guidance she needed *"from the horse's mouth"*. Teresa articulated this dilemma further by stating that although she did not want to appear "needy" the pressure to gain answers was more reflective of reality:

> Teresa: Your tutor's got the answers, you see, so you wanna hear what they have to say without appearing too needy or like you couldn't work it out yourself. But... hmm…yes… it's obviously our learning at the end of the day.

Sub-theme 4.2: Building students' self-belief through trusting relationships

Students talked of *"dips"* (Conor) or *"low ebbs"* (Tom) in self-confidence when their assignment failed and, conversely, *"great happiness"* (Lisa) and *"relief"* (David) when assignments were graded highly or – in some cases – had just passed. However, it was at the low points in their study that participants expressed faith in the marking tutor to help re-build their self-confidence, principally through encouragement and positive reinforcement: *"You just need them [tutors] to say 'you can do it' and believe you are capable enough"* (Conor). Thus, a critical purpose of DF was to provide a place and space for students to gain: *"…a much-needed confidence boost"* from their tutor (Lisa).

A key element in students' talk of building confidence related to the trust they had in their tutors. An example of this can be seen in the following extract from Conor's interview:

> Conor: For me, personally, if I trust the tutor then I would speak with them about how I felt I was doing and any other issues I was having. I think trust is the most important part of it all as you have to be confident enough to say if you are struggling and why.

David expressed a particular viewpoint that, having received a failed grade, he lost trust in himself and the decisions he had made in the process leading up to submitting his assignment: *"Without the confidence to go forwards, you just stop trusting yourself and the decisions you make. Especially when you fail. But you trust your tutor. If they say you can achieve this or that, you believe them"*. Thus, DF gave students an opportunity to address their feelings of low self-confidence, through gaining direct encouragement from their tutor. This appeared to strengthen the trusting relationship.

However, within this relational aspect, despite feelings of low self-confidence being dominant at the time, a significant contradiction was noted relating to the way that some students expressed how they did not want to appear in front of their tutors as lacking in confidence. An example of this paradox came from Jenny, who stated that it was necessary to "*put on a brave face*" to the tutor as a means of "*…appearing as if you are coping OK*". Conor was also reluctant to be open about his lack of self-confidence to his tutor, stating that he did not see the purpose of "*selling himself short*" within the AFT and potentially labelling himself as a student who was not meeting the University's expectations. Considering the significance of students' talk of trust and honesty being an essential element of their relationship with their tutor, this appeared as a notable contradiction. Similar incongruity was noted in the previous sub-theme, where students expressed strong desire not to appear "*needy*" (Teresa) within the AFT, whilst at the same time behaving in such passive ways that elicited the direct intervention from their tutor. Debbie offered some explanation as to this type of behaviour, describing the way in which some students, in certain situations, feel the need to construct an outward identity to manage their tutor's impression of them:

> Debbie: I think a lot of people definitely put on a Facebook face in tutorials.
> Researcher: …Sorry? That's not a phrase I know. Can you explain, please?
> Debbie: Yep. I mean. Like on Facebook. You put out there what you want people to see. How you want them to think about you and your life. You edit your life. Your pictures and stuff. Yeah. I think speaking with tutors about your assignments can be a bit like that [laughs].
> Researcher: How's that?
> Debbie: You don't want them [tutors] to think badly about you and you want to show you are OK, coping and getting on with it.
> Researcher: How do you see this in terms of honesty? To your tutor… to yourself?
> Debbie: Hmm… I think it's not being dishonest – put it that way [laughs] and if it makes *you* feel better then… [shrugs].

The concept of a "Facebook Face" will be revisited within the Discussion chapter, as a means of understanding this critical finding.

Sub-theme 4.3: Seeking reassurance through pastoral support

Students reported that the experience of attending the AFT offered an opportunity to seek personal and emotional reassurance from their tutors.

> Jenny: I had failed two modules and my head was all over the place and I was panicking.
> Researcher: What did you hope would be the outcome from meeting your tutor?

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Jenny: I think I was really seeking her reassurance. That it would be OK – you know? That I would be able to carry on, on the course. That I was able enough.

Students expressed that, upon receiving a failed or very weak grade for their assignment, negative emotions (e.g. anxiety, panic and low self-esteem) were triggered, which resulted in some of them questioning their ability to continue with their study. Thus, the AFT offered a safe space where the student could gain reassurance from their tutor of their academic potential and future place on the course. Most frequently, the types of reassurance students sought within the DF focused around two key points:

- That their place on the course was safe.
- That their tutor believed they were sufficiently academically capable to continue successfully on the course and meet future demands.

Participants explained that the reassurance they received proved that the DF was as much a pastoral experience as it was an academic one. Conor expressed this in terms of his tutor going "*beyond the call of duty*":

Conor: I think it's a testament of how good some of the tutors are here… hmm… yeah, that they will give up their own time to see you and ensure you are feeling OK. Even when they are really busy themselves. You know, that's really beyond the call of duty I think… as they [tutors] don't have to do that – do they?

Building upon this point, the findings revealed that students valued reassurance from tutors who were: a) accessible b) honest/direct c) calm d) kind. There was frequent reference to the "*knowledge and experience*" (Lisa) of the tutor who had "*seen it all before*" (Conor). As such, the expert tutor was able to swiftly "*put into context*" (David) the failed grade as a means of helping the student to "*see the bigger picture*" (David). Lisa referred to the pastoral feature of the DF experience as "*the human touch*" which she explains in the following extract:

Lisa: I think… when you are confused and feeling like everything is getting on top of you… you need to talk to someone – don't you? You need the human touch. You need to see and hear your tutor give you positive feedback. I think that is more reassuring than what you find on your written feedback.
Researcher: Can you explain a little more what you mean by the 'human touch' in terms of your feedback?
Lisa: Hmm. I remember [on receiving a failed assignment] I couldn't concentrate properly on the written feedback as all I kept thinking was just how badly I had done! Funny though, when I spoke to the tutor they just talked through the feedback but it really helped me to stop panicking and I could get on.

It is clear from Lisa's experience, that written feedback does not convey "*the human touch*" in the same way as DF.

In probing the notion of reassurance further, two additional viewpoints emerged. The first relates to the way that students perceived DF as an opportunity for them to offer their tutors reassurance of: a) their commitment to the course; b) their self-belief in their own ability to continue c) their ability to manage and control their studies. An extract from Debbie's interview highlights this point:

> Debbie: I remember feeling mortified on receiving my failed grade! I just thought that the tutor would have been really judgmental and I was so embarrassed.
> Researcher: And the AFT helped with this?
> Debbie: Yes. Definitively. It was good to be able to let the tutor know that I had worked really hard on the assignment. Somehow, in my own mind, I felt I had redeemed myself, even though she [the marking tutor] said there was no need to convince her.

However, Teresa cautioned that in offering reassurance to her tutor she may have been perceived as trying to excuse her weak grade. Teresa explained this dilemma, stating that having recently suffered an (undisclosed) personal issue outside of the university, she was in two minds as to whether to share this information with the tutor as she didn't want to be judged as selling a "sob-story" (Teresa):

> Teresa: I didn't want it thought that I was telling a sob-story. I know some friends thought it shouldn't have been a part of the discussion with the tutor… but I wanted her to know that my work had not been up to my usual standard because of what was going on in my personal life at the time. I did feel better for telling her, as it helped me to know that she knew there were other reasons for the work failing.

Sub-theme 4.4: Getting motivated

Within this sub-theme of 'getting motivated', students used the DF opportunity as a means of generating motivational feelings as a means of combating the negativity experienced at having received a failed graded assignment. Commonly, students recounted that the motivation generated helped them to engage with the tutor's feedback more positively. As Matt reported, *"Definitely talking through your feedback with your tutor, even if you are disappointed with it, gets you more motivated to do more with the feedback"*. For other students, being motivated had wider implications, helping them to consider more fundamental changes to the way in which they approached their studies:

David: When I met with my tutor, it was clear that I needed to buck my ideas up, to be honest. It did make me think about how I was using my time and how I was preparing for assignments and things. I did go away from the meeting thinking... I had a whole lot of changing to do.

Building upon this point, the findings showed that getting motivated could be experienced in two different ways. First, some of participants associated being motivated by their tutor in the form of, "…*a bit of a pep talk*" (David) or "*a gentle nudge of encouragement with lots of positive praise*" (Lisa) or, more directly, a "*wake-up call... through the tutor being cruel to be kind*" (Conor). Students also reported getting motivated more indirectly, through responding to the authority and position their tutors held. As students knew they would be discussing their assignment within the AFT, they felt obligated to take some action to engage with the feedback in advance. Tom explained this phenomenon:

Tom: You know you are going to have to talk about the work and the feedback in the tutorial. So it [the AFT] definitely makes you read the tutor's comments in advance. If you didn't you'd look like you couldn't be bothered which would not be good in front of your tutors.

Conor concurred with this perspective, adding that the "threat" of meeting with his tutor prompted short-term change in his study practice.

Conor: I do normally read my tutor's feedback on every assignment. But it was not in the same way as when I knew I had the threat of meeting with my tutor. I'd say at that point, I really thought about what they were saying so I put in additional effort. I even re-read my paper over again in preparation. Honestly, I don't normally do that now though.

In all cases, the tutor's role appeared – directly or indirectly – as a significant driver of students becoming more motivated.

In probing other motivational factors, the data revealed a degree of strategy on the part of students. For example, in Matt's interview he stated that a significant motivational factor in requesting an AFT was "…*based upon the fact that the tutor was also my course leader*" indicating that the level of authority and position of the marking tutor acted as a significant influence in his decision. Debbie expressed a similar strategic reflection, stating that the marking tutor might be her dissertation tutor in the future.

Debbie: I knew that the tutor taught on year 2 and 3 modules and… it would just be my luck… that she would also end up as my dissertation tutor. So, yeah, I thought I'd best make the effort.

Within the findings relating to this fourth research question, it was evident that students held a particular perspective of their tutor as leader within the context of the DF. This positioned students in the role of novice, following the advice and directions of their tutor perceived as the expert. The analysis showed that students regarded the tutor's experience, authority and authorship of the feedback, as being key reasons why they trusted their tutor's judgement. These findings also contributed to explaining why students felt reassured by their tutor when addressing their academic and emotional needs.

Research question 5: Is there evidence within the data of students strategically managing their DF experience through the use of self-presentational behaviours? If so, what meaning can be made from this?

Introduction

As previously explained within the Methodology chapter, following the analysis of data relating to the first four research questions, the fifth and final research question was developed. This focused upon exploring evidence of student self-presentation behaviour within the corpus of data already analysed to produce the findings. As a means of identifying and categorising these behaviours, Schutz's (1998) taxonomy of self-presentation styles was employed (see below). Within the Literature chapter, a fuller theoretical discussion underpinning Schütz's (1998) taxonomy is presented. However, in summary here, her taxonomy consists of four main self-presentation styles. Next to each style, I have included a summarised explanation, followed by a bullet list of associated typical behaviours.

	Self-presentation styles	Summary	Typical behaviours
1	Assertive	"Try to look good by presenting a favourable image"	1a. Ingratiation 1b. Self-promotion 1c. Power display 1d. Identification
2	Offensive	"Try to look good by making others look bad"	2a. Derogating competitors 2b. Critical evaluation of a third party 2c. Attacking the source of criticism 2d. Determining the topic of discussion
3	Protective	"Trying not to look bad by avoiding the conveyance of negative impressions"	3a. Avoiding public attention 3b. Minimizing social interaction 3c. Remaining silent 3d. Passive but friendly interaction
4	Defensive	"Trying not to look bad by fighting off negative typifications"	4a. Reframing 4b. Disassociation 4c. Excuses 4d. Concession, apologies and remediation

Table 9: Taxonomy of self-presentation styles (Schütz, 1998) (adapted)

Using Schütz's (1998) taxonomy as an analytical framework, the following findings relating to students' self-presentation styles - and their associated typical behaviours - are detailed below.

Self-presentation style 1: Assertive

"Try to look good by presenting a favourable image" (Schütz, 1998, p.614). Schütz identified the following four typical behaviours associated with assertive self-presentation: 1a) ingratiation; 1b) self-promotion; 1c) showing strength and 1d) identification.

1a. Ingratiation:

According to Schutz, within 'ingratiation', "…the ingratiator wants to appear likeable by doing favours, complementing others, describing himself or herself favourably, or showing opinion conformity" (1998, p.614). An extract from Jenny's interview provides an example of ingratiating behaviour.

> Jenny: It sounds a bit lame, but I did take in my essay with my highlighter points all over it hoping my tutor believed that I have made some attempt to address their feedback before meeting with them. I know I'm not the only one to do this [laughs] but I wanted to appear as if I was taking control.

Here, Jenny shares a practice of showing her tutor ways in which she has physically addressed the written feedback by the use of a highlighter pen. Such a gesture is aimed at showing, in a tangible way, the value she places on the tutor's advice and guidance and the response she has made to the feedback in preparation for the tutorial. Her ingratiating self-presentation behaviour is conscious and enacted in the belief that such a tactic will help to present herself as proactively managing her studies. It also demonstrates a high degree of conformity and respect for the judgement and authority of the tutor.

1b. Self-promotion.

"Showing successful performances or claiming such performances in the past are means of conveying the impression of competency to observers" (Schütz, 1998, p.614). The extract below from Debbie's interview demonstrates self-promoting behaviours.

> Debbie: I remember feeling mortified on receiving my failed grade! I just thought that the tutor would have been really judgmental and I was so embarrassed.

> Researcher: And the AFT helped with this?
> Debbie: Yes. Definitively. It was good to be able to let the tutor know that I had worked really hard on the assignment. Also… the fail had been a one-off as all my other grades had been good. But… hmm… somehow, in my own mind, I felt I had redeem myself, even though she [the marking tutor] said there was no need to convince her.

Here, Debbie 'self-promotes' by taking the opportunity of the DF to reassure her tutor that she was a committed and hard-working student. By sharing with the tutor her strong academic profile, Debbie helps to contextualise the failure as a "one-off" and, in doing so, looks to convince the tutor of her academic capability.

1c. Power-display

"A power display is not used to create fear in others but to assure others that the individual is in charge and able to achieve" (Schütz, 1998, p.615). Lisa's extract, below, shows one interpretation of power-display being enacted within the AFT.

> Lisa: It's the intensity of it all really… and the not knowing what they [tutors] are going to talk about. You just don't wanna be judged again – for the second time – I felt myself sitting and smiling a lot at the tutor in the hope it wasn't going to be too painful!
> Researcher: Did that work?
> Lisa: Kind of [laughs]. I remember trying to point out some of the good things I had done. You know, to keep it positive and show the tutor that I was taking it all in.

Through her positive and confident body language, Lisa consciously aims to take control of the direction of the DF to reassure the tutor of her ability. Her strategic behaviour, to divert the tutor's attention to positive parts of her assignment, helps Lisa to take charge of the direction of the DF and reduces the chance of the tutor probing weaknesses in the work. Her conscious actions to "keep things positive" also asserted a confidence that was presented as a means of Lisa showing the tutor she was capable of managing the feedback and understanding the points being made.

1d. Identification

According to Schutz (1998), "Identification aims at emphasizing membership in a specific group that is evaluated positively by the actor" (p.615). An extract from Conor's interview illustrates this behaviour:

> Conor: The beauty of talking through the feedback with the tutor is that you can come back to them and explain things, err, like how and why it was written in such a way or why you may have not done so well. You wouldn't really write back to a tutor explaining this when you get just normal written feedback. You just accept it.

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> Researcher: This helped you convey these feelings…?
> Connor: Yes and to show that I'd been to things like the support sessions and the PASS sessions to try and improve. I wanted to show him I was committed.

Here, Conor openly shares with his tutor his voluntary attendance at study support and Peer Assisted Study Support sessions (PASS) led by university staff and senior students on his course. In doing so, Conor aligns himself with groups of highly motivated and committed students willing to make space in their busy schedules to take advantage of additional learning opportunities.

Self-presentation style 2: Offensive

"Try to look good by making others look bad" (Schütz, 1998, p.615). Schütz identified four typical behaviours associated with offensive self-presentation: 2a) derogating competitors; 2b) critical evaluation of third party; 2c) attack the source of the criticism and 2d) determining the topic of discussion. I will now offer findings for each of these typical behaviours.

2a. Derogating competitors

"As observers usually judge by comparison, one means of achieving a more positive evaluation is to make others with whom one is compared look less positive" (Schütz, 1998, p.615-616). An extract from Debbie's interview illustrates this behaviour.

> Debbie: We was all really struggling with understanding some of the theories relating to equality that we had been introduced to in one module. It just went over my head. I knew I had still got it wrong when I wrote my essay and it was raised in the tutor's feedback. So, in the tutorial, I had a chance to go through it in more detail… quietly and calmly. Yeah, it really helped that the tutor took the time to explain it to me.
> Researcher: You say we?
> Debbie: I mean the whole group. I wasn't the only one not to understand it so I passed that on to the tutor who was grateful for the feedback.

By referring to the rest of the cohort, Debbie normalises her mistakes and deflects attention away from her individual poor performance. In addition, through explaining that she was not alone in not understanding an aspect of the assignment - and offering this as feedback - she shifts some of the responsibility for the group's failure back to the tutor.

2b. Critical evaluation of a third party

"In the eyes of observers, ironic statements create the impression of a sharp mind that sets tough standards of evaluation" (Schütz, 1998, p.616). An extract from Lisa's interview illustrates this behaviour; the example is both subtle and nuanced, and positions Lisa as an evaluator of her tutor's academic judgement.

> Lisa: I had to bite my tongue on a few occasions when we [student and tutor] were going through the feedback as I really felt that my work had met all of the expectations… but clearly not [rolls eyes].

Within the extract, Lisa recounts having to "*bite her tongue*" within the DF exchange, illustrating how she believed her understanding of the assignment was, in part, more accurate than that of her tutor. Through her final statement (i.e. "*but clearly not*") Lisa appears to concede the ultimate authority of the tutor. However, her associated body language (i.e. rolling eyes) indicates otherwise, demonstrating her continuing conviction of her interpretation.

2c. Attacking the source of criticism

Schütz (1998) argues that by attacking a source's competency or credibility, its criticism can be weakened and actors can manage to look superior to observers. This technique includes charges of incompetence and bias" (Schütz, 1998, p.616). Although this was not a commonly found behaviour amongst participants, the following extract from David's interview demonstrates an 'attack' on the source of criticism regarding the quality of his assignment (i.e. marking tutor).

> David: I have met a couple of my tutors to discuss my feedback… when I've not been happy with it…over the last couple of years. Most recently was when the tutor had given really positive feedback but the mark was in the low 40s. I was like… err… how does that work? When I tackled her about this she made some excuse about her not being able to change the mark. I was going to exert my rights and make a complaint but didn't in the end. But I think more students, paying what we are paying, need to be confident to challenge things when they are not right.

David criticises the logic of the tutor's grading and approaches this directly by 'tackling' the error he believed her to have made. David's dismissal of his tutor's response as an "excuse" adds to his negative judgement of the tutor and his low opinion of her competency. His final statement, referring to his "rights" as a fee-paying student, acts as a defence for such challenging behaviour and deflects from his weak performance in this instance.

2d. Determining the topic of discussion

Schütz (1998) describes the behaviour of determining the topic of discussion as:

> …a powerful self-presentational tool, as people engaging in such behaviour convey an impression of being in charge; they control the interaction and keep at bay topics that do not allow them to create desired impressions (p.617).

An extract from Matt's interview is included here as an example of determining the topic of discussion.

> Matt: I want to know from them [tutors] – from the start – what they were expecting in terms of the standard etcetera. That's why the meetings are so useful.
> Researcher: Anything else?
> Matt: Hmm, yeah, you understand, from them [marking tutor] telling you where you went wrong against what they wanted to see. When they explain this, in a tutorial, you can then see it more easily in your own work. It makes the tutorial also feel like less of a slating of your work.

Matt emphasised that DF afforded an opportunity to understand more general aspects relating to the assignment e.g. his tutor's expectations and University published standards. He stressed that he wanted to know this information "*from the start*". Thus, Matt took early command of the direction of the dialogue, and in so doing, avoided the focus being directed towards the poor quality of his work. Such behaviour could be interpreted as an avoidance tactic. That is to say, by Matt determining the topic of the discussion, he deflects questions away from his own academic performance and the potential embarrassment of having his work "slated".

Self-presentation style 3: Protective

"Trying not to look bad by avoiding the conveyance of negative impressions" (Schütz, 1998, p.617). This third style will be explored through the typical behaviours of: 3a) avoiding public attention; 3b) minimizing social interaction; 3c) remaining silent; 3d) passive but friendly interaction.

3a. Avoiding public attention

"Not being looked at prevents critical evaluation, so avoiding attention can be a means of trying to avoid criticism" (Schütz, 1998, p.617). An extract from Teresa's interview is illustrative of this behaviour.

> Researcher: So no-one shares their grades?
> Teresa: Well, yes, they do if they have passed really well or if they have done better than they expected. But not usually if you do really badly or fail. I'd only ever tell my closest friends as I don't want to be judged by the rest of the cohort.

Teresa explains that on receiving her failed grade, she avoided the attention of her peers as she did not want to draw attention to her failed grade. She rationalises this behaviour by stating her concern that she may be judged negatively by her peers. Teresa explains an exception to this, stating that she would confide in her closest friends. She also offers insight that, in her experience, students are more comfortable to share their grade widely with each other if they have achieved a high grade. This perception, coupled with her reflection of avoiding public attention, suggests a degree of competition amongst the undergraduate cohort, resulting in students self-protecting their learner identity from one another.

3b. Minimizing social interaction

"The fear of misbehaving and consequently being evaluated negatively may result in avoidance of social interactions. Not interacting with others reduces the risk of leaving negative impressions, just as it reduces the chances of conveying favourable ones" (Schütz, 1997, p.617). Similar to Teresa's extract above, Jenny's interview included reference to wanting to 'bury her head' as a means of "*damage limitation*" to her reputation.

> Jenny: I think you go either way when you get a bad grade. You can either think… 'I need to sort this out' or, more usually for me, you want to shut the world away for a bit and bury your head. I didn't even want to come into lectures or even go to the library as I wanted damage limitation! That's when you need to talk through the assessment with a tutor. So they [tutors] can make sure you don't end up chucking it all away and drifting off.

Jenny's perspective highlights her negative feelings about receiving a low grade. She cites "*drifting off*", or leaving the course, as an option for her, even though she concedes that such an action would be 'chucking away' a valuable opportunity. By minimising social interaction however, Jenny was able to create a space to seek the sole advice of her tutor, whose guidance

she clearly respected. Within this space, she also reduced her exposure to the possibility of further negative criticism from others.

3c. Remaining silent

"When one says little or nothing in social interactions, there is little probability of saying something wrong thus the risk of negative evaluation is reduced" (Schütz, 1997, p.617). An extract from Debbie's interview illustrates how 'remaining silent' was a tactic for protecting herself from "*saying something wrong*".

> Debbie: Everyone knows what it's like when you show a piece of work to your tutor. You suddenly think 'did I reference that right'? 'Will they find something, hmm, like copying in my work? I think I have a natural guilt complex.
> Researcher: Did that impact on the AFT – do you remember?
> Debbie: Yep – I clammed up. I just found myself panicking that I was going to say something wrong and set myself up. Silly I know but I think it was the stress of it all.

During the DF, Debbie "*clammed up*" as a means of reducing the risk of adding further to the negative evaluation she perceived her tutor had of her ability. Due to overwhelming feelings of anxiety, Debbie experienced emotions relating to guilt and self-doubt. These levels of stress resulted in her opting to remain silent during parts of the DF, in order to not 'set herself up' by saying the wrong thing.

3d. Passive but friendly interaction

"Self-presentation in pleasant, friendly terms, including agreeing frequently with one's interaction partners, may limit others to uncritical responses" (Schütz, 1997, p.617). Jenny's description of passive but friendly interaction is summarised as she talks about the tutor/student interaction.

> Jenny: Your tutor will usually read through their annotations and comments, and stop to explain them if you are in any doubt or you don't understand them. Hmm… Like a check-list. Yeah. I'd say this is what most commonly happens in the tutorial.

Jenny's description of the type of interaction experienced within the DF was common across all data sets. Here, student passivity was neither contested, nor perceived as unwelcomed by the participants. Indeed, data converged around agreement that such an arrangement of roles

was most effective in meeting their expectations of the AFT, as a space to receive tutors' guidance as to how they could improve academic performance and avoid future failure.

Self-presentation style 4: Defensive

"Trying not to look bad by fighting off negative typifications" (Schütz, 1998, p.618). Within this final self-presentation style, four strategic behaviours are explored. These include: 4a) reframing; 4b) dissociation; 4c) excuses; 4d) concessions, apologies and remediations.

4a. Reframing

"The person admits that a certain event has happened but argues that it should not be seen in a negative way" (Schütz, 1998, p.618). Matt's extract was typical of participants' perspectives relating to reframing behaviours.

> Matt: I think the failure gave me a bit of a wake-up call if I'm honest – and seeing the tutor confirmed that.
> Researcher: How so?
> Matt: I think I began to realise that I couldn't just sail through the course with no hard work. I think it made me less lazy and leaving everything to the last minute.
> Researcher: Did you change your study habits in the long-term having been through this experience?
> Matt: Hmmm [laughs]. I'd like to say 'yes' but… truthfully… I still think I work better to imminent deadlines. I like the pressure you see. So, in answer to your question… probably not.

Employing the term "*wake-up call*", to help reframe the experience of the AFT as a positive one, Matt accepts the failed grade he received and takes responsibility for it. He reflects upon the DF as a critical moment of realisation when he acknowledged the need for greater effort in his study if he was to succeed. However, when questioned whether the outcome of this 'reframing' and reflection had had a long-term impact upon his study habits, Matt responds that he had reverted back to his default position of being motivated by an impending deadline. In his closing statement, Matt's reflection that he would "*like to say yes*" to the question of whether his study habits had changed, is evidence of the kind of mimicry in which students sometimes engage.

4b. Disassociation

"The main statement is "It was not me." People using disassociation accept that a negative event has taken place, but affirm that they have not caused it" (Schütz, 1998, p.618). An extract from Tom's interview provides an example of disassociation.

> Tom: You so sometimes want more information about the assignment beforehand. For example, when I did really badly in my first essay I think we hadn't been given enough guidance.
> Researcher: What guidance would you have wanted?
> Tom: Hmm… I think how to structure that assignment. It's not all tutors I have to say. Some give a whole lot more than others. But sometimes you are just left to figure it out. Which is hard at the beginning of your course.

Tom disassociates himself from his failed assignment and transfers part of the responsibility for his grade on to his tutor. Through complaining of a lack of initial guidance given regarding expectations as to the structure and content of the essay, he compares his experience to more favourable practices associated with other tutors who offer a "*whole lot more*" support and direction.

4c. Excuses

"Actors using excuses accept responsibility for a negative event, but they put forward extenuating circumstances. They may claim that they could not control the event or did not foresee the consequences" (Schütz, 1998, p.618).

Across all eight interviews, students offered a variety of excuses to explain their poor academic performance. These were often related to issues found outside of their university study, including: a) illness and well-being; b) relationships and familial duties; c) bereavement; d) finances and part-time work; e) housing and accommodation. However, an extract from Teresa's interview demonstrates a potential conflict and tension that students might experience when providing excuses within the context of an AFT.

> Teresa: I didn't want it thought that I was selling a sob-story. I know some friends thought it shouldn't have been a part of the discussion with the tutor… but I wanted her to know that my work had not been up to my usual standard because of what was going on in my personal life at the time. I did feel better for telling her as it helped me to know that she knew there were other reasons for the work failing.

Teresa indicated that, relaying information about her personal circumstances to the marking tutor when discussing her grade outcome, was not thought appropriate by some of her peers. She explained that students might consider her excuse as "*selling a sob-story*", thus manipulating the tutor to treat her more sympathetically. This implies that excuses, within the context of the AFT, could be perceived as a means of gaining an unfair advantage.

4d. Concessions, apologies, and remediation

Schütz (1998) states that, "Apologies and remediation may save a person's image as honest and responsible, even though he or she may have to bear the consequences of being responsible for a negative event" (p.618). Lisa makes explicit reference to wanting to apologise for the "*fuss and bother*" created from having failed her assignment and requesting an AFT. She reports attending the meeting, prepared with tangible evidence of previous successful academic performance, in order to appease and reassure the tutor as a means of remediation.

> Lisa: I really did not want [the marking] tutor, who also happened to be the Course Leader, to think I wasn't capable. So I took in my Record of Achievement, with all my previous grades in, to the tutorial just in case. This seems a bit extreme now but at the time I felt I needed to be prepared just in case. I think it was – like – hmmm… that I wanted to apologise for all the fuss and bother and to show her that I was really committed.

Further findings

There were some identified behaviours from the data which do not fit neatly into Schütz's (1998) taxonomy. For example, within students' AFTs, they frequently made reference to their future aspirations and ambitions. This often took the form of students sharing, with their marking tutor, their hopes for: a) achieving a good degree at the end of the course; b) gaining specific employment on graduating or c) attaining a place onto further training/study. Regardless of the aspiration cited, a connecting feature was students' reference to successful academic performance as being a determining factor in being able to realise their aspiration.

The following three extracts illustrate this finding.

Example extract 1: Jenny

An extract from Jenny's interview illustrates how she makes direct reference to future ambition and aspiration to get onto a post-graduate teacher training course, linking academic success as a pre-requisite.

> Jenny: I told her [marking tutor] that if I didn't get a 2:1 overall I wouldn't be able to get onto the PGCE and go onto teach. Hmm… it was really important that I got it all sorted out quickly as each of the assignment scores in year 2 are a stepping stone to that goal. It has been too long a dream of mine to become a teacher you see and one I share with my daughter every day. So, yeah, it was a case of damage limitation as I have no other idea of what I would want to do!

Jenny speculated to her tutor, the potential "*damage*" that the failed mark could have upon her future aspiration "*…to go on to teach*". Her concern is constructed around the notion that her undergraduate degree was a required qualification for entering into post-graduate professional training and that, in turn, was the qualification required for fulfilling her life-long ambition to teach. Thus, for Jenny, modular success was a necessary "*stepping stone*" to that ultimate goal.

Example extract 2: David

In David's extract (see below), he relays to the tutor his ambition to be the first person in his family to graduate from university.

> David: I am the first to come to University from my family you see. So… I think it's extra-pressure, as I keep being reminded of how they will all be celebrating at graduation. I did share this with the tutor who helped me to stay calm and see sense. It was nice – as she understood the pressure I felt. She was also the first in her family to go to university.

As a first-generation student, he talks of his family being proud of him studying and becoming a graduate, placing greater pressure upon him to academically succeed. He offers tangible insight into the emotional pressure he feels, by sharing his family's excitement at plans for celebrating his graduation at the end of his final year. The significance of graduation for David and his family could not be understated, as it acts as a pivotal point in his family's history. It also signals a significant change, whereby future members of his family attending university would not be 'labelled' first-generation.

Example extract 3: Teresa

Within the extract from Teresa's interview, she reflects her desire to gain "*a good degree*" as a direct means of getting a "*good job*". However, without gaining an upper 2:1 or first class degree, Teresa believes she would have to face the disappointment of a less ambitious future.

> I just started freaking out to my tutor as I was really panicking about all the money I was spending in fees and rent and… for what? Truly, all I could think about was the future debt me and my partner… who's working all hours… was going to be in. And for like what… a bad degree? Hmm… I just thought 'was it worth it'? I mean… I know studying is not just about getting a good job but… with a good degree… it's more likely isn't it?

Within the extract, Teresa shares with her tutor the financial hardship that she and her partner have endured over the period of her study. She draws upon the additional work her partner was doing to support her study, thus adding to the emotional burden of failing. She questions whether completing her degree, with no guarantee of gaining a first or upper second classification "…*was worth it*?" In doing so, Teresa questions whether the degree has been value for money, when the return for her investment appears so insecure.

Summary

The findings demonstrate participants' perceptions and experiences of DF as being predominately monologic, tutor-centric and grade focused. Framed by the purpose of gaining tutors' corrections and direct guidance on their summative assessment, DF was understood by students to be an effective and efficient means of feedback. The one-to-one context of the DF was also perceived as offering a personalised learning experience, where students' specific questions and concerns could be answered. However, DF was not conducted within a social and/or affective vacuum, with findings illuminating strong negative emotions and feelings being experienced by students upon receiving their failed grade. Thus, the research demonstrated how the AFT was perceived as a place and space for pastoral - as well as academic - support.

This research also showed how students, within the unfamiliar and emotionally charged DF context, managed the outward impression they were projecting to their tutors. Using Schütz's (1998) taxonomy of self-presentation, the data revealed a variety of ways in which students engaged in such behaviours. Most apparent within the transcripts, were the assertive and protective styles of self-presentation, where the students aimed to present and/or protect a

positive self-conception to their tutor. There was less evidence of students engaging in offensive and/or defensive behaviours, although isolated incidents were noted in individual cases. Further, the findings illuminated a set of behaviours that were not easily categorised using Schütz's (1998) taxonomy. These behaviours appeared to be connected by students sharing with their marking tutor the importance of their academic profile in realising their future ambition.

The following Discussion chapter will draw upon extant literature and published research to make-meaning of these findings and discuss how they individually and collectively address the research aim and questions.

CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

Within this chapter, findings relating to each of the five research questions are addressed and discussed in light of existing research and extant literature.

1. What do undergraduate students perceive the nature of dialogic feedback to be?
2. How do undergraduate students understand the purpose of dialogic feedback?
3. How do undergraduate students describe their emotions and feelings relating to dialogic feedback experiences?
4. Within the context of dialogic feedback, how do undergraduate students perceive their relationship with the marking tutor?
5. Is there evidence within the data of students strategically managing their DF experience through the use of self-presentational behaviours? If so, what meaning can be made from this?

Having adopted an IPA approach, I am conscious of a number of important points at this stage in the write-up process.

First, during the process of making meaning from the findings, I fully acknowledge the complexity and ethical sensitivity of working with and within the double hermeneutic. Thus, as the researcher producing my interpretations, I have continually referred back to individual transcripts – as well as my analytical notes – as a means of ensuring the quality of what is being presented. Second, although recurrent themes have been produced that reflect the cross-case approach adopted, I have not dismissed the importance of the individual voice in producing this discussion. Thus, where appropriate, individual quotations have been used in the discussion in recognition of this important feature of IPA. Third, this chapter makes reference to extant literature and published research, however, significant gaps in the literature – relating to students' perceptions and experiences of DF – have added an additional challenge to the process of theorising the findings. On a positive note, it is these gaps that motivated my engagement with a wider field of literature, generating new ways of interpreting and making-sense of, the student experience.

6.2 Research question 1 - What do undergraduate students understand the nature of DF to be?

Main theme	Sub-themes
1. A verbal exchange	1.1 A semi-formal act of speaking and listening
	1.2 A purposeful verbal exchange, focused upon the summative assessment feedback with marking tutor
	1.3 An effective and efficient form of feedback
	1.4 A verbal exchange, located within voluntary assessment feedback tutorials
	1.5 A supportive discussion to address failed and/or weak academic performance

Table 10: Table of main and sub-themes relating to research question 1 - What do students perceive the nature of DF to be?

Sub-theme 1.1: A semi-formal act of speaking and listening

Across all eight interviews, dialogue was understood to be an interactive, two-way verbal exchange, between the marking tutor and student. Supporting Alexander's (2001) view that dialogue is both conversation and enquiry, students expressed their understanding of the term to be a verbal exchange, with an opportunity to question their tutor regarding feedback commentary. Further, it provided an opportunity to gain clarification of the grade awarded. This notion of engagement within a dialogic exchange, reflects key aspects of Bakhtin's (1984) concept of 'authentic dialogue', "To live, means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth" (p.293). However, the findings also suggested a significant contradiction in students' perception of DF and the actual experience reported, which rarely provided a place and space "…to embrace rich, iterative and penetrating discourse" (Gibbs, 2014, p.9). The findings revealed the AFT as being a convergent space where knowledge was fixed, commodified through the authority of the tutor. The research supports Bohm and Peat's (1987) argument that the DF experienced was similar to an "ordinary discussion" rather than a dialogic exchange:

> A key difference between a dialogue and an ordinary discussion is that, within the latter people usually hold relatively fixed positions and argue in favour of their views as they try to convince others to change. At best this may produce agreement or compromise, but it does not give rise to anything creative (p.241).

Thus, for the participants, DF was not a space for "…colliding and testing diverse ideas" (Matusov, 2004, p.7). Rather, it was perceived – and experienced – as an opportunity to gain

direct intervention from their tutors, to support improvement in future academic performance. As such, I would argue that students' perceptions and experiences of DF were more akin to monologic or "feedback-as-telling" (Sambell, 2011, p.10) rather than dialogic feedback.

Sub-theme 1.2: A purposeful verbal exchange, focused upon the summative assessment feedback with marking tutor

Students expressed that the primary objective of DF was to find out from their tutor how they could correct their work, and to seek clarification around aspects of the summative written feedback and grade awarded. Prompted by "…the need for objective understanding" (Buber and Smith, 1947, p.19) that could help "…address the accuracy of a response to a problem or task", the purposeful exchange of DF had a clear performative focus that promoted the convergence, rather than divergence, of ideas. As a means of reinforcing this transmission mode of feedback, "…an instrumental approach to communication" (Lyle, 2008, p.225) was found, with students seeking "*straightforward advice*" (Jenny) from their tutors. Further analysis of this point revealed an interesting perspective relating to the way in which students perceived the AFT to be a space and place for personal tuition. This supports Kulhavy's (1977) argument that correctional feedback can become a process that "…takes on the forms of new instruction, rather than informing the student solely about correctness" (p. 212). Here, students collectively agreed that large group sizes, instructional teaching methods, embarrassment of asking questions in front of peers and a lack of opportunity to ask questions of their tutor during class time, compounded the problem of not understanding some of the more complex and/or theoretical aspects of their learning. This closely corresponds with Lind et al.'s (2016) assertion that:

> In today's lectures, students may face large amounts of difficult material covered in a short time span. Consequently, students may come up with questions regarding the covered material. In our experience, many of these questions seldom get answered partly due to the fact that many students do not ask them. One contributing factor to students not asking questions may be that they do not want to interrupt the lecturer, or possibly since they do not dare to ask questions when the crowd is listening (p.1).

I argue that being able to engage with both tutors and peers alike, is a fundamental and necessary part of becoming a graduate. However, larger teaching groups – serviced by didactic, non-interactive teaching methods – have reduced the central role of dialogue in students' learning experience. This was further reinforced through students reporting little or no experience of formative opportunities within their modules, or the chance to discuss draft

assignments with their tutors. Thus, against such a backdrop, Jenny's reflection of the value of the DF as being an opportunity to talk with her tutor – even though it was prompted by a failed grade – makes increasing sense: "*Although no-one wants to fail an assignment and have to have an AFT, the support you get in the tutorial can be a bit of a silver-lining, if that makes sense?*

Ways in which students perceived the effectiveness and efficiency of this transmission mode of feedback, is discussed in sub-theme 3 below.

Sub-theme 1.3: An effective and efficient form of feedback

Participants' perceptions reflected findings in the research literature that assert the principal purpose of feedback is to "… 'put things right' by taking a corrective action" (Price et al., 2010, p.279). The analysis showed that the more specific and swift the corrective feedback, the more powerful and valuable students found it, especially where they could make direct connections between the advice given and future improvement to their academic performance (Baron, 1988). This finding has significant support in the literature, with proponents of 'immediate' feedback arguing that "...the earlier corrective information is provided, the more likely it is that efficient retention will result" (Shute, 2007, p. 16).

Within the context of this research, it is understandable that students who had failed an assignment were seeking swift resolution as a means of reducing the negative feelings experienced and reported upon in the findings. Having questions answered by their tutor, in "*live-time*" (Matt) was highlighted as a key advantage of DF over written forms of feedback where students perceived there to be little or no interaction. The urgency to gain tutor's responses was, I argue, compounded by the fact that at the time of attending their AFT students would have been studying other modules. Thus, gaining their tutors' swift corrective advice was seen as a necessity in preparing them for the next round of the assignment submissions. However, a counter-argument for feedback being delivered immediately states that, 'delayed feedback' "…may encourage learners' engagement in active cognitive and metacognitive processing, thus engendering a sense of autonomy (and perhaps improved self-efficacy)" (Shute, 2007, p.18). Upon reflection, I feel the argument of immediate or delayed (within this context) is less important than what students are expected to do prior to, and during, the AFT

itself. Put another way, maximising the opportunity for students to be partners in the assessment and feedback process, is more critical in raising the quality of the DF experience.

Students also articulated that DF was an 'efficient' mode of feedback. This, I argue, was a reductionist perspective of the experience, and reflective of a commodified view of knowledge. For example, Matt described the process of addressing issues in the feedback as being "*done and dusted*", and Conor stated that the questions he had could be "*sorted out there and then*". However, Collini (2011) raises the issue of how deep learning requires perseverance and determination on the part of the student. He asserts that:

> The paradox of real learning is that you don't get what you 'want' – and you certainly can't buy it. The really vital aspects of the experience of studying something (a condition very different from 'the student experience') are bafflement and effort. (Ibid., p.10).

I concur with Collini's (2011) viewpoint, and question whether the value that students placed upon their DF experience was due to the complex process of knowledge construction being simplified within the AFT. Students' reference to "*getting answers*" (David) from the tutors, suggests learning is viewed as something that can be pre-packaged for easier consumption. Within this conception, the responsibility for time-consuming thinking on the student's part is removed and replaced with instant advice. This, I argue, services the demand of the consumer market and responds to the performative pressures upon which it relies.

Sub-theme 1.4: A verbal exchange, located within voluntary assessment feedback tutorials

The AFT was viewed by participants as offering voluntary support, which they could request from their marking tutor. However, there was some conflicting evidence within the data that led me to question the degree to which DF was genuinely voluntary and reflective of students' autonomy and agency.

To help analyse this further, I refer back to the work of Macfarlane (2015) who defines student performativity around three aspects, namely: a) presenteeism; b) learnerism and c) soulcraft. I argue that the 'voluntary' act of students booking an AFT could be understood as individuals feeling obliged (i.e. learnerism) to present themselves (i.e. presenteeism) to their tutors as a means of giving an oral defence of the quality of their assignment as well as a justification of their place on the degree programme (i.e. soulcraft). The findings demonstrated that students

believed that not booking an AFT would be met with disapproval from their course tutors as it would be perceived that they were not taking "*adult responsibility*" (Teresa), which is paradoxical considering that choice forms a fundamental element of adult learning. Further, students took the opportunity to meet with their tutor to make a tangible signal of their engagement with the feedback. This example of presenteeism is evidence of a belief among some of the participants that attendance (e.g. at a tutorial/seminar) equates to learner engagement.

I argue that students felt direct pressure from their course tutors, to book and attend AFTs as a means of reassuring them of their commitment to the course and to demonstrate that they were proactively engaging with the given feedback – even if this was not the case in reality. Thus, I assert that the elements of MacFarlane's (2015) model of performativity – and the various behavioural norms it helps to reinforce – act to motivate and shape students' decision to book and attend an AFT. This conflicts with the notion of the AFT being truly voluntary and/or the act of an autonomous learner. Rather, the decision to book an AFT appears more a conditioned response, or conformist behaviour (Kottasz, 2005), to meet institutional expectations and limit the damage to the individual's reputation with the tutor. The findings were inconclusive as to the degree to which students were conscious of this situation, as participants slipped between expressing an earnest belief in the agency they felt they had, whilst in the same breath, being more cynical of it. As Lisa stated: "…*It's good to feel you have the option of seeing your tutor if things have not gone well. That said, I'm not sure it would go down too well if you didn't (aside) if you know what I mean*".

Sub-theme 1.5: A supportive discussion to address failed and/or weak academic performance

Findings illuminated students' tacit understanding that AFTs were only provided for individuals who had failed and/or performed very weakly in their assessment. Although all students *could* ask to meet with their tutor to discuss their feedback, it was agreed by participants that this was not common practice. Students shared a perspective that "*tutors are busy people*" (Lisa) and therefore DF was restricted and reserved for "…*those in most need of extra help*" (Teresa). However, when asked, participants strongly agreed with the suggestion that formative, one-to-one tutorials should be implemented in *all* modules, for *all* students, at a point prior to submission. This directly supports recent research that identifies key trends in

undergraduate students wanting: a) increased contact time with their tutors; b) greater balance between summative and formative feedback and c) more frequent opportunities to gain direct support from their tutors via structured opportunities (Neves and Hillman, 2016). Closer analysis of the data also revealed that DF was perceived as a mode of support that some of the students felt represented value for money, with David presenting a more direct argument that it should be understood as a "*basic expectation for the amount of money being paid*". Such views were reported by Kandiko and Mawer (2013) in their research exploring students' expectations of HE. They concluded that there was a dominant:

> …consumerist ethos towards higher education, with students wanting 'value for money'. This was seen tangibly through sufficient contact hours and resources available and abstractly through institutions' investment in students, learning spaces and the educational community (p.7).

This growing shift in student expectation has been identified and reported upon within my own institution (see Chapter 2, Policy), posing a significant dilemma for university managers who, on the one hand, need to be seen responding to student needs, whilst at the same time working within increasingly constrained budgets. Adding a further complication to this issue is the fact that – as this research has shown – students viewed their marking tutor's support as being of the greatest value, as they were the ones understood to be marking the final submission. This clearly raises pragmatic questions as to the practicalities of how such provision could be realistically organised, without the loss of teaching time and/or unacceptable increases in pressure upon tutors. However, I argue that – over and above the practical concerns of organising such resource-heavy support – the sector needs to establish a working partnership with its student body which directly addresses the negative side-effects of consumerism. As Healey et al.'s (2014) partnership model argues (see Chapter 3), student/tutor responsibility is a shared endeavour, and the expectation of engagement in the learning process and outcomes are of mutual, not singular, concern. Davis (2011) summarises this point:

> The business model obscures the responsibility and involvement required by students in the learning process. Good students are responsible for reflecting critically, exploring ambiguities, and giving and receiving feedback. A customer does not have responsibilities beyond the economic (p. 88).

The following section will discuss what students perceived the purpose of DF to be.

6.3 Research question 2: How do undergraduate students understand the purpose of dialogic feedback?

Main theme	Sub-themes
2. To improve future grades and prevent further failure	2.1 To understand the right way of knowing and doing
	2.2 To correct poor academic practice
	2.3 To gain support for weak subject knowledge

Table 11: Table of main theme and sub-themes relating to research question 2 - How do undergraduate students understand the purposes of dialogic feedback?

Sub-theme 2.1: To understand the right way of knowing and doing

The findings revealed a number of student perceptions relating to the outcome of the assessment. Critically, the feedback sheet returned to students with their marked assignment incorporated two key pieces of information i.e. the written commentary and percentage grade. Collectively, these were used summatively and formatively by students, as indicators of both their current academic performance and ways in which it could be improved in the future. The findings indicated that an important purpose of the DF was for students to gain insights into what their tutor had expected to read within the assignment. On discovering more about tutor's expectations, students felt better equipped to compare their work to the tutor's "*right way of thinking*" (Jenny). This enabled them to "…close the gap between their current understandings, performance and a goal" (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p.86).

Miller and Parlett (1974) argue that for students to be successful in understanding their tutor's expectations, they need to be able read certain cues or signals that often indicate tacit and/or subject expectations that frame the assessment. For students who fail assignments, their inability to read their tutor's cues (i.e. 'cue deafness') may be a contributing factor to their failure. The findings reflect this situation, with students expressing a key purpose of the DF being to gain tutor's direct advice and become more 'cue conscious'. Wanting to understand the right way of knowing or doing acted as a key motivator in students' decision to book an AFT. This finding resonates with Miller and Parlett's (1974) view that, in relation to assessed work,

> …students work out for themselves what counts, or at least what they think counts, and orient their effort accordingly. They are strategic in their use of time and 'selectively negligent' in avoiding content that they believe is not likely to be assessed' (Ibid., p.5).

From this conception, I argue that transmission modes of feedback could be perceived by students as the most effective form of supporting them in understanding what the tutor believes "the right way" to be.

The following section explores how students interpreted 'the right way of knowing and doing' through the identification of two types of corrections.

Sub-themes 2.2 and 2.3: To correct poor academic practice and to gain support for weak subject knowledge

As the findings for sub-themes 2 and 3 complement each other, they have been conflated into this one sub-section, thus allowing a degree of comparison to be brought into the discussion.

As discussed in the previous section, students perceived the key purpose of DF was to understand their tutor's expectations and, in doing so, gain correctional advice about the right way of knowing and doing. In exploring how students understood the correctional advice they had received, the analysis revealed two categories:

- Corrections associated with poor academic practice.
- Corrections associated with weak subject knowledge.

From students' descriptions of the two categories, corrections relating to poor academic practice were perceived as tangible and specific. They were often errors that, in students' perceptions, required little debate or interpretation as they tended to be regulated by policy (e.g. referencing format) or by universally recognised norms (e.g. spelling or grammar). Contrary to this, weak subject knowledge was perceived as more complex being theoretical and conceptual in nature. Thus, correcting weak subject knowledge was understood by students as being more challenging to address, requiring greater effort on their part to interpret and understand. From my own tutor experience, unpicking such misconceptions and/or misinterpretations of subject knowledge, demands a significant amount of time for both tutor and student. However, the findings revealed that much of the time in AFTs was spent addressing corrections relating to poor academic practice, which students felt was useful and did not question. In reflecting upon this finding, I suggest two reasons why this may be the case.

The first relates to the fact that participants were studying a modular degree course, where each module addresses a theoretical aspect of subject knowledge, e.g. 'Morality', 'Laws and legalities' and 'Research writing'. However, as Bridges (2000) asserts modularisation leads to a "…deconstruction of the subject" (p.42), which can limit students' understanding of the inter-connectedness of what they are learning within each modular unit and how feedback from one module can support learning elsewhere. Essentially, modularisation can negatively impact upon the way in which students perceive feedback as being isolated and solely associated with a given module. This argument can be used here to explain why, within the AFT, students might struggle to see the relevance of focusing upon feedback about weak subject knowledge within one module assessment, in the belief that it may not impact upon subject content of future new modules. This argument is further supported by Hughes et al. (2015) who state that:

> …while it is straightforward to develop essential skills through error correction in context, the higher order learning attributes may be difficult to address through feed forward, especially in modularised systems where longer-term goals and progress towards these goals are not transparent. Moreover, to learn from critique, students must engage through questioning and dialogue, and not passively receive instructions on what to do next from assessors (p. 1092).

The second reason is almost in opposition to the first. Here, I argue that students tacitly appreciate and understand the importance of rectifying issues of poor academic practice, as they form a fundamental aspect of *all* assessment, regardless of the module to which it is attached. Thus, by addressing issues of poor academic practice relating to one module, there is a significant chance it will improve academic practice – and thus grade performance – in future assessments. Although there appears a gap in the literature to help explain this finding, Amrhein and Nassaji's (2010) research posits that:

> …students' approval of written corrective feedback, that requires less of their effort to correct, shows their keenness on transferring the responsibility of error correction to teachers. This desire to shift responsibility to teachers contradicts the overall goal of language pedagogy, which should be to increase student autonomy and to equip them with strategies to improve the accuracy of their own writing (Ibid., p.116).

There was evidence in this research to support Amrhein and Nassaji's (Ibid.) observation as participants shared a common expectation that the corrections gained in the DF would generate both from their tutor's written feedback and the tutor's verbal clarification of them. However, I would argue against Amrhein and Nassaji (Ibid.) assertion that this presents a 'shift of responsibility', as it assumes that students would consider having the responsibility in the first instance. From the findings, I would offer a counter argument and state that – as recipients of

the feedback – the participants within this research did not position themselves as the owners of the feedback either before, during or after the DF experience.

6.4   Research question 3: How do undergraduate students describe their emotions and feelings relating to DF experiences?

Main theme	Sub-themes
3.Feelings of low self-confidence	3.1 Feelings of exposure
	3.2 Feelings of anxiety
	3.3 Feelings of apathy

Table 12: Table of main theme and sub-themes relating to research question 3 - How do undergraduate students describe their emotions and feelings relating to DF experiences?

Sub-theme 3.1: Feelings of exposure

Among the data relating to students' emotional responses to the DF experience, a shared theme of 'feeling exposed' was identified across all eight participants. Although the feeling of exposure was common, explanations students gave as to its cause were varied. Three of the most frequently cited are as follows:

First, students' feelings of exposure were linked to the unfamiliarity of the experience of discussing feedback – in a one-to-one context – with their marking tutor. All eight participants reported that DF (via the attendance at an AFT) was reserved for individuals requiring additional support due to them having failed – or achieved a weak pass in – their assignment. Thus, the majority of students were unlikely to experience DF, in the context of an AFT, during their time at university. However, if they did, it could feel akin to the kind of embarrassing exposure experienced in secondary school. As Lisa described: "*It reminded me of waiting outside the head teacher's office when I was at school. I was expecting to read 'SEE ME!' at the bottom of my essay*". I argue that such "episodic and mechanistic practices" (Boud and Molloy, 2013, p. 709) reduce the opportunity for students to become familiar with the ways in which dialogue can support meta-cognitive development and deeper learning (Barker and Pinard 2014). Further, I suggest that such unfamiliarity may prevent students from gathering the necessary experience to enable them to actively engage in dialogic exchange and participate in ways considered to be in partnership with their tutor.

Second, as participants perceived DF as support only for those students who had failed or achieved a weak pass in their assignment, attending an AFT could result in them being exposed and/or labelled as failures by peers, tutors, family and friends. For some participants, this

resulted in them hiding, from those closest to them, the fact that they had attended an AFT for fear of shame and/or embarrassment. Others concealed the failed mark from peers, family members and friends as a means of protecting their outward image, preferring instead to be thought of as confidently progressing through their studies without interruption. Harlen and Crick (2002) explain this phenomenon and the impact it can have upon a student's self-esteem.

> Students who are compared unfavourably and publicly with their peers suffer low self-esteem in relation to learning. They avoid risks and use less effective, more superficial learning strategies. Hence their own and others' perceptions of them as learners, suffer as a result. Not only do their own perceptions of themselves as learners suffer but this perception becomes shared by their peers (p.15).

Critically, there was tangible concern from those participants who were financially dependent on partners and/or family members, that their failure may be viewed as a poor return for their investment (Higgins et.al, 2001). Thus, additional performative pressure is exerted upon these students, increasing anxiety and further debilitating their self-confidence.

Finally, students described how DF could place them and their work under additional scrutiny. In doing so, they expressed concern that the tutor may find additional errors in their work, possibly leading to the assignment being judged for a second time. Although students asserted this had not been their actual experience, such worries and concerns added to the overall sense of pressure and stress in preparing for the AFT. This supports Carless' (2006) assertion that: "Assignments are mainly a personal and individual activity, so if feedback is negative it can be threatening to a student's self-perception" (p.221).

Sub-theme 3.2: Feelings of anxiety

The findings demonstrated that, on receiving their failed grade, students experienced high degrees of stress and anxiety. Much of this was attributed to their feelings of disappointment, frustration, embarrassment and uncertainty, and led to some students recounting memories of wanting to leave the course as a means of dealing with the feelings of failure. These findings reflect research conducted by Neves and Hillman (2016) who state that "Students' anxiety levels are markedly high and notably above those of the population as a whole, including young people" (p.40). These emotions placed students into an aversive state (Bordia et al., 2004) which, due to the unpleasant feelings it generates, can distract and/or de-motivate students from the task at hand.

In helping to make-meaning of the feelings they experienced, I draw upon Nussbaum's (2001) conception of emotion, which states that any component deemed important to individuals, institutional systems and/or society will, of necessity, evoke strong emotions. Nussbaum (2001) goes onto define emotions as:

> …appraisals or value judgements [which are] our ways of registering how things are with respect to the external (i.e. uncontrolled) items that we view as salient for our well-being... or flourishing (p. 4).

Against the previously described backdrop of student performativity, asymmetric power relations and the central importance that students place upon assessment outcomes, this theorisation of emotion helps to explain why the affective dimension dominated much of the talk of the DF experience. I assert that students' feelings of stress and anxiety were generated from their appraisal of the external situation (i.e. the assessment feedback) as being something beyond their control. Upon receiving a failed assessment, students feel powerless to redress their failure immediately (due to the University examination processes) and thus continue to view their future as anything but "flourishing" (Nussbaum, 2001). Within such a conception, students' well-being may well be adversely affected.

From this interpretation, I reflect upon two key points within the existing research literature. The first, suggests the need for students to be placed at the heart of their learning and specifically, the assessment and feedback processes. Rather than a 'done to' model of assessment and feedback, I support the call from the Higher Education Academy (2012) which argues that students should be offered:

> …greater partnership in assessment, with a clear voice in institutional decision-making regarding assessment. Efforts would be made to increase their understanding and trust in assessment through greater opportunity for self and peer review, providing them with information about assessment safeguards and by engaging them in enhancing assessment policy and practice (p.17).

Second, in a bid to reduce student anxiety and stress when engaging in DF, I believe that dialogic experiences should be infused within the curriculum and scaffolded appropriately. 'Bolt-on' dialogic experiences (such as AFTs) - although offered for the very best reasons - need to be reviewed, as they may do more harm than good. Here, I draw upon the work of Joughin (2007) and Huxham et al. (2012) who both researched oral assessment methods. These researchers came to the same conclusion as the findings in this research, stating that a lack of

previous experience of oral assessment, coupled with its differing demands on the students to explain themselves, increases the potential for stress and anxiety.

Sub-theme 3.3: Feelings of apathy

A commonly held feeling on receiving a failed assignment was apathy. Lisa described wanting "*…to shut the world away for a bit and bury your head*". Krause (2005) explains this state as "inertia" or "doing nothing" (p.4) and favours the term over 'disengagement' which is more "…an active detachment or separation from all that a university has to offer" (Ibid.). In support of Krause's conception of 'inertia' I add that, for the participants in this research, it appeared to be a temporary state, where the individual needed to create a space to begin processing their emotional response to receiving their failed grade. As evidenced within the findings, this period of time offered students a chance to *"cool off"* (David) and gain greater clarity as to how to move forwards.

To help understand this finding more fully, I draw upon Kluger et al.'s (1994) argument which states that when students receive feedback, it is appraised in terms of the degree to which it might harm or benefit the 'self'. It is also evaluated against action that might subsequently need to be taken to rectify the assessment failure. Lipnevich and Smith (2008) build upon this argument stating that, in such circumstances, "…a potential threat to the self may instigate high activity on the student's behalf. At the same time, it may debilitate students so they cannot act" (p.34). Thus, the 'cooling-off' space – identified as occurring between receiving their summative feedback and attending an AFT – is significantly important. I argue that it is within this space that students make critical decisions, both positive and negative, which may impact heavily upon their future learning. Therefore, in order to manage the emotional turmoil identified within this space, students need to be equipped with the kinds of strategies to help cope with the disappointment of failing an assessment.

Main themes	Sub-themes
4.Students' perceptions of students as novice and tutors as expert.	4.1 Tutor leading the feedback
	4.2 Building self-confidence of the student, through trusting relationships
	4.3 Seeking reassurance through pastoral support
	4.4 Getting motivated

Table 13: Table of main theme and sub-themes relating to research question 4 - Within the context of dialogic feedback, how do undergraduate students perceive their relationship with the marking tutor?

Sub-theme 4.1: Tutor leading the feedback

As argued previously, the transmission model of feedback appeared to be dominant within students' perceptions and experiences of DF. Transmission modes of feedback assume a uni-directional process, placing "…students in a passive role that might prohibit them to decode and internalise the feedback message" (Geitz et.al, 2016). This creates a "power asymmetry" (Värlander, 2008, p.152) within the DF context, where tutors were commonly expected to lead the student through the feedback, taking a dominant role in the exchange. I interpret this imbalance of power as being similar to those hierarchal relationships traditionally found in compulsory education, where the teacher performs a gatekeeping role of expert disciplinary knowledge (Lea and Street, 1998, p.169). As such, the tutor's authority of expert is reinforced, whilst the novice student is positioned as a compliant recipient of authorised knowledge (Freire, 2004).

Participants describe DF as being an experience where*, "Your tutor will usually read through their annotations and comments"* (Debbie). From this commonly held perspective, the tutor is depicted as a 'leader' and the student a 'follower'. Tutors' active and authoritarian role is exercised through the exposition and clarification of written feedback, already once delivered to the students on their feedback sheet. Such a ranked relationship is in direct opposition to those models of co-partnership presented within the literature chapter (Healey et al., 2014), which show that engagement is not focused solely upon the outcome of assessment but also within the process. Yang and Carless (2013) concur with this perspective, arguing that by involving the students more centrally in the process of assessment, DF can stimulate student engagement with disciplinary problems, as well as developing orientations towards self-

directed learning. Savin-Baden (2008) offers a reasoned argument for the apparent lack of student engagement found with DF, stating that it is the tutor's lack of challenge and expectation which acts as a critical barrier to students taking greater responsibility for their learning.

> Rarely these days do lecturers challenge students to consider their position in the learning process or engage them in the process of taking a stance towards knowledge. This lack of expectation of students by staff is creating a culture of dependency within the university, which is compounded by staff's need to cover ground, create outcomes, define knowledge – which is a further barrier to students taking responsibility for their learning (p.52).

Within the context of the AFT, the findings presented some conflicting evidence as to how students perceived themselves as independent learners. Three key observations from the data will now be discussed.

First, as has been shown, students were passive partners in the DF verbal exchange, having expectations that their tutors would take the lead in delivering correctional advice and guidance. Although students readily concurred that – as adult learners – they were responsible for their own learning, this did not appear in evidence from recounts of their experiences. Rather, through responding to the emotional pressures of having failed an assignment, I argue that participants accepted a dependency model of DF which was understood as being most effective in "*getting answers*" and "*knowing the right way of thinking and doing*". Both of these objectives fulfilled students' perspective of the broader purpose of the AFT as being a support mechanism, to improve future academic performance and avoid failure. This complex connection, between independent learning, student anxiety and issues of progression influencing students' engagement, concurs with the extant literature that argues such pressures can lead to students rejecting taking greater responsibility for their learning (Leese, 2010).

Second, it was noticeable that students talked more confidently about their role and responsibility in directing their learning after the AFT had concluded. Most frequently, this manifested itself in students accepting that, post AFT, it was their responsibility to make the critical decision as to whether or not to follow-up the advice and guidance received from their tutor. In contrast to the first point raised, without their tutor present students accepted that there was no-one to make this decision for them. From such responses, it became clear that some of the participants viewed independent learning as being determined by the physical presence

and/or absence of the tutor. The literature suggests that some students can misconstrue independent learning to mean taking responsibility when physically alone and/or not directly in contact with their tutors (Green, 2008). I argue this perception is reinforced due to the tutor-centric nature of the AFT experiences and the lack of evidence of more co-constructive relationships and/or equal partnerships in the assessment and feedback process (Boud and Falchikov, 2007; Brooks and Tough, 2006; Mansell and James, 2009).

The final point relates closely to how learner independence was expressed in activities students reported engaging in pre- and post-AFT. Pre-AFT, students' spoke generally about "*reading through their feedback*" as a means of being prepared for the AFT. Whilst post-AFT activity most commonly related to following-up tutors' directions by responding to the corrections they had raised within the AFT. Absent from both of these observations was evidence of students displaying personal initiative – a key attribute of independent learning as argued by Zimmerman (1990). Although further research into reasons for this phenomenon would be needed, I argue that these findings offer further evidence of students' belief of the novice/expert dichotomy and the asymmetric power relationships reported on within the AFT.

Sub-theme 4.2: Building self-confidence of the student, through trusting relationships

One of the key reported consequences of receiving a failed assessment was that students felt less confident in their decision-making and overall academic ability. The grade received had a powerful impact upon the way in which students processed and articulated their failure. Further evidence showed that the grade positioned them in a ranking within their peer group, adding to their sense of deflation and disappointment, particularly when it appeared their performance placed them lower than students perceived to be weaker than themselves. This resulted in some students withholding their grade (and even attendance at an AFT) from their peers as a means of protecting their public learner identity. This supports Gibbs and Simpson's (2003) posit that:

> A grade is likely to be perceived by the student as indicating their personal ability or worth as it is usually 'norm-referenced': it tells you, primarily, where you stand in relation to others. A poor grade may damage a student's 'self-efficacy' or sense of ability to be successful (p.9).

Although responses varied as to the longevity and intensity of the feelings of low self-confidence, all students referred to the way in which the DF afforded a place and space to gain

tutor support in helping them rebuild their self-esteem. Critical within the talk of this functional aspect of the DF, was students' reference to the trusting relationship they had established with their tutors. Carless (2009) outlines the importance of trust in assessment practices, including trust in both the received feedback and the teacher. He states that: "For formative feedback to flourish it is necessary for students to be willing to invest trust in the teacher" (p. 82). Bond (2004) defines trust as a relationship of such quality that "…both parties are confident that it can withstand the challenges of inequality, risk, uncertainty and difference. In order to learn something, the learner has to move beyond their 'comfort zone' and often has to face uncertainty and risk" (p.4).

Trust is particularly important within the DF as there may be differences in the way in which tutor and students perceive the quality of the work, as well as the outcome of the assessment. Crick (2007) adds to this notion, highlighting that the strength of the trust between student and tutor is essential if it is going to be able to withstand potential conflict.

> Further, the teacher often does know, while the learner does not, and this is an unequal balance. The characteristic of trust, or the confidence that these things can be faced and negotiated, and that the relationship will not break down through abuse or fragility, appears to be a critical thread in the ecology of a learner-centred environment. It could be argued that where there is no risk, uncertainty or inequality, there is unlikely to be learning (pp. 147-148).

As argued previously, in monologic modes of feedback, there is little risk or challenge to the learner's established ways of thinking or understanding, as a cognitivist view of knowledge construction is transmitted through direct feedback advice from the tutor (Black and Wiliam, 1998). Following through Crick's (2007) assertion above, without risk and uncertainty being present, the potential for more transformative learning to happen within the AFT is significantly reduced.

Sub-theme 4.3: Seeking reassurance through pastoral support

The findings showed that students expected their tutors to play a multitude of different roles within the dialogic exchange e.g. confidence builder, counsellor and motivator. Common to all these roles was an element of the tutor taking a pastoral role and attending to the emotional well-being of the students. However, the data showed some conflict between how students

understood the roles of a marking tutor (within an AFT) and a personal tutor (within Personal Academic Tutorials). In defining personal tutorials Hixenbaugh et al. (2005) argue that:

> The evidence clearly indicates that students want the personal tutoring system to provide regular and frequent scheduled meetings in which they are actively provided with feedback concerning their general progress. These students want personal tutors to take an active role throughout their degree and to be accessible, approachable and reliable. They want personal tutors who can relate to them, who are enthusiastic and care about them. It is recommended that universities devise personal tutoring structures that enable students and personal tutors to develop a relationship from the beginning of the students' entry to university. These meetings, group as well as individual, need to be scheduled and lack of attendance should be followed up (p.56).

However, this research found that, with regards to gaining support for academic progress, participants experienced that the advice given in the personal tutoring system was frequently too general and not specific enough for their own personal academic needs. Therefore, when discussing the role of the tutor in offering DF on their assignments, students strongly asserted an expectation that their marking tutor – not personal tutor – should lead the AFT. I would add a further argument here regarding Hixenbaugh et al.'s (2005) suggestion that non-attendance at personal tutorials should be followed up. I believe care needs to be taken that such practice does not become patriarchal and add to the pervading discourse of student performativity and presenteeism as previously discussed. I concur with MacFarlane (2016) that "…there is a need to rebalance policy and practice by strengthening the emphasis on rights within the curriculum, such as fairness in group assessment, respecting 'passive' as well as 'active' learning preferences, sanctioning reticence in class discussion, and recognising that attendance is a learning choice made by adults" (p.851).

Within the dialogic space of the AFT, students described their engagement with their marking tutor in ways that surpassed a sole academic remit. This reflected, at times, more therapeutic and/or counselling models of tuition. This reflects Jacques' (1990) posit that students expect their tutors to:

- Be a 'friendly parent' when they feel lost in the comparative anonymity of higher education
- Act as agents at the interface between the personal and the academic

More specifically, the findings illuminated a key theme of 'reassurance' that emerged when students' talked about their relationship with tutors. From the analysis, I sub-divided 'reassurance' further into two distinct groups as follows:

- Students wanting to reassure the tutor of their commitment to the course and the effort they had put into creating the assignment
- Students wanting to gain reassurance from their tutor that they were able to continue with their studies

Regardless of whether students were giving or receiving reassurance, both interpretations were closely linked to feelings of anxiety and pressure at having failed their assignment and the need to seek support from their tutors. However, the research also highlighted students' awareness of not wanting to appear *"needy"* (Teresa) or over-reliant upon their tutors, which presents something of a paradox. In an attempt to make-meaning of this phenomena, I draw upon the work of postmodern researchers, such as Bernadini (2014), who attribute an increase in dependency in young people through "...the gradual creation, by the market itself, of a new social figure: the infantilist adult or, as recently named in the American scientific production, the kidult" (p.41). He explains that, as a consequence of the performative pressures exerted on young people by the consumerist manipulations of the neo-liberal market, "…a sense of dependency prevails over the search for independence. It becomes an inescapable condition which jeopardises the natural path toward autonomy and individual and social self-determination" (Ibid.). Within the context of HE, critics of student dependency have linked such behaviour to dominant discourses of student satisfaction and welfare, reducing the sector to a paternal and infantalised state. Writing in the Times Higher Education newspaper, Furedi (2016) asserts that:

> …since the 1980s, there has been a growing tendency for academic institutions to resume a paternalistic role, treating students as incapable of exercising the responsibilities associated with adulthood. Many of the illiberal, paternalistic policies that are now promoted in universities are justified on grounds that are akin to those used in child protection (n.p).

However, there is counter argument to be found in the literature that rejects discourses of dependence/independence in that they can be deliberately used to label those students who may not fit a particular, or accepted, way of approaching their study. As Goode (2007) argues, such students can become:

> …subject to the negative moral discourse surrounding 'dependency,' via an infantilising discourse that characterises them as immature learners, rather than as agentic students acting rationally (p. 592).

The findings correspond with the research literature that signals some students' reluctance to attend face-to-face feedback meetings with their tutor to discuss assessment feedback due to the potential awkwardness of the situation and the negativity students were feeling about their study. Such feelings of isolation and not fitting in, could contribute to students not seeking advice from their tutors and/or leaving the course. An example from Matt's interview offers insight into the potentially difficult situation of wanting to attend the AFT, yet recognising the ultimate authority of the tutor:

> Matt: Hmm... it was a bit awkward if I'm honest as I wanted to have bit of a rant about things on the module and how we had been prepared for the assessment. But then you are talking to the person who taught it *and* marked the paper. So… hmm… yeah… tricky one.

Summarising these points, Bohnacker-Bruce (2013) concludes from her research that "…while verbal feedback may be seen as most effective in terms of learning outcomes, it is potentially an awkward experience for students, particularly if the work to be discussed is of a low standard" (p.27). Bohnacker-Bruce (2013) cites Robinson et al.'s (2011) research, which reports that nearly 40% of research participants in their study stated that they would arrange a meeting with their personal tutor to discuss their work, which leaves a majority of over 60% not taking this course of action. This presents something of a dilemma for the sector, as there is growing evidence of students wanting more face-to-face support from their tutors, as a means of gaining help to decode their assessment feedback (Brown; 2007; Mulliner and Tucker, 2017). Reflecting upon the finding of this research and the degree to which students felt the AFT significantly helped them to manage the period of addressing their feelings of failure, I would argue that understanding why students do not attend AFTs needs further research.

Sub-theme 4.4: Getting motivated

Ryan and Deci (2000) state that, "To be motivated means to be moved to do something" (p.54). It can be understood in terms of the level of motivation i.e. the amount or intensity and the orientation i.e. the type of motivation and the underlying attitudes and goals that give rise to

action (Ibid.). Within motivational theory, two common terms prevail: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation:

> The most basic distinction is between intrinsic motivation, which refers to doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable, and extrinsic motivation, which refers to doing something because it leads to a separable outcome (Ryan and Deci, 2000, p.55).

Both terms have been widely used and debated within education, with intrinsic motivation frequently being linked to higher quality learning, learner autonomy and agency (Ibid.). Hence, it is understandable that the desired outcomes of student-centred learning have been closely aligned to developing students' orientations towards more intrinsic motivation (Nukpe, 2012). However, within the research findings, much of the data relating to 'getting motivated' depended upon the extrinsic role of their tutor, to either give them "...*a gentle nudge of encouragement*" (Lisa) or a more direct "...*wake-up call*" (Conor). In essence, students turned to their tutors for direct motivational intervention, wanting both "...*positive praise*" (Lisa) or a frank talk, which may involve the tutor having to be "...*cruel to be kind*" (Conor). Thus, regardless of how students expressed 'getting motivated', the source upon which this relied remained the same i.e. the tutor. Even when students talked of wanting to improve their grades and/or to do better in future assessments – which could be understood as more intrinsic orientations – these statements were connected to and reliant upon their tutors' judgements and grading.

Although more data would need to be collected to truly understand this phenomenon, I draw upon Duckworth and Peterson's (2007) theory of grit, previously explored in the literature review, which states that "...perseverance and passion for long-term goals" (p.1087) are necessary attributes for students to develop academic resilience. However, as has been shown thus far, students experience of AFTs were more monologic, tutor-centric models of DF, where academic and pastoral issues were expected by students, to be swiftly resolved with the timely intervention of their tutor. Although I do not deny direct support is sometimes necessary to help students through such troublesome periods I argue that, in doing so, the sector should not seek to sanitise the learning experience in such ways as to reduce students' responsibility and accountability for their own learning (Bamber, 2016). Indeed, I hold the view that it is only from actively wrestling through some of the more challenging moments in study that deeper, transformative learning can result.

6.6 Research question 5: Is there evidence within the data of students strategically managing their DF experience through the use of self-presentational behaviours? If so, what meaning can be made from this?

Introduction

Having discussed findings relating to the first four research questions, I will now turn attention to the fifth and final research question that explored how students interact with their marking tutor, within the DF context. In doing so, I will draw upon the findings, presented in Chapter 5, regarding the existence of self-presentation behaviours within the data. The chapter will offer argument as to why these self-presentation behaviours exist in AFTs and what this may mean for students' ability to self-direct their learning. The discussion will conclude with a rationale for the newly created self-presentation behavioural type of 'speculative ambition'.

5.1 Managing the dialogic feedback experience

The fifth question arose at a latter point in the research journey, where I had developed "a tentative proposition" (O'Leary, 2004, p.37) from the first set of findings (i.e. from questions 1-4 previously discussed). My guiding hypothesis was that students navigated and managed the unfamiliar, and often uncomfortable, experience of DF by modifying their behaviour within the AFT. Adding to this conjecture, I believed that students modified their behaviour for two reasons. The first, to project a positive impression to their tutors and second, to protect an idealised self-conception they had created of being successful, competent learners. As a means of building my theoretical argument for this hypothesis, I reflected upon the dramaturgical theory of Goffman (1959) presented in the literature review (see Chapter 3). Within his seminal work, Goffman argued that humans perform, or act, within the social world. In doing so, they present an idealised version of their own self-conception to others around them, "The mask we wear, represents the conception we have formed of ourselves – the role we are striving to live up to – this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be" (p.19).

The idea of 'wearing a mask' resonated closely with my emerging conceptualisation of the data. This perspective supported the emerging hypothesis, too, that students were acting or performing within the DF as a means of presenting an idealised self-conception to their tutors.

One particular extract from Debbie's interview, resonated particularly with Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical viewpoint:

> Debbie: I think a lot of people definitely put on a Facebook face in tutorials.
> Researcher: …Sorry? That's not a phrase I know. Can you explain please?
> Debbie: Yep. I mean. Like on Facebook. You put out there what you want people to see. How you want them to think about you and your life. You edit your life. Your pictures and stuff. Yeah. I think speaking with tutors about your assignments can be a bit like that [laughs].
> Researcher: How's that?
> Debbie: You don't want them [tutors] to think badly about you and you want to show you are OK, coping and getting on with it.
> Researcher: How do you see this in terms of honesty? To your tutor… to yourself?
> Debbie: Hmm…I think it's not being dishonest – put it that way [laughs] and if it makes you feel better then… [shrugs].

As a more contemporary take upon Goffman's idea of a mask that we wear, Debbie believes that within AFTs students put on a 'Facebook Face' to edit and airbrush their 'self' as a means of creating an idealised 'student-self' conception. To expand upon this point, Debbie explains that her outward self is adapted to fit with what she believes the university (or the marking tutor) perceives as 'the perfect student-self' i.e. committed, capable, content and responsible. From the findings, as well as my own personal experiences, these expectations are further reinforced by peers, partners and family members, who hold high hopes for the student gaining a good quality degree. This may be particularly pertinent if they are directly supporting the individual financially, emotionally and/or through child-care for example. This point closely corresponds with Baumeister and Hutton (1987) who state that individuals may adapt their behaviour due to "…the evaluative presence of other people and by others' (even potential) knowledge of one's behaviour" (p.71). Although Debbie did not fully answer the question of whether she believes this act to be honest or not, it was clear that it offered her some sense of comfort in that she was able to control what she presented to the tutor. Thus, in doing so, she exerted some agency within the DF context.

Upon further analysis of the data, I noted there were still some behaviours that did not present such an idealised version of the student-self. For example, I noted occasions when students expressed dissatisfaction regarding their tutors' marking of the assignment, and/or the unfairness of grades achieved by other students. Further, several participants expressed negative feelings of helplessness to their tutors, offering reasons such as home or work-life issues, to explain their poor academic performance. These behaviours were far from the

'idealised' version of the student-self. Rather, they positioned the individual's self-conception as being dissatisfied, argumentative, powerless or not-coping. Thus, there appeared to be some conflict with my hypothesis that the students wanted to present a positive self-conception to their tutors.

From further sustained engagement with the literature, I elected to use Schütz's (1998) work as a means of making-sense of the conflict found in the data. This decision was based upon her assertion that individuals may engage in self-presentational behaviour, not only to achieve positive impressions, but also to avoid being judged negatively. Schütz (1998) defines self-presentation as being dependent upon:

> …the person's underlying intentions (Is the actor trying to achieve positive impressions or trying to avoid negative typifications?) as well as the level of activity or aggression involved. Each style is characterised by specific strategies and has its own advantages as well as its own pitfalls (p. 623)

This feature, in Schütz's definition, was critical in helping to explain why some students used strategic behaviours that did not align to the 'ideal student-self'. To gain deeper understanding of this phenomenon, I employed her typology of self-presentation behaviours as a framework to categorise the range of self-presentation behaviours found within the data.

5.2 Making-meaning from self-presentation findings

From analysing the data using Schütz's (1998) typology of self-presentation, the findings show a range of behaviours being used within the DF space. Whilst all of Schütz's (1998) categories could be identified within the data (see Chapter 5 Findings), students most frequently engaged in protective and assertive behaviours, aiming to either:

- not look bad by avoiding the conveyance of negative impressions
- look good by presenting a favourable image.

There was far less occurrence of offensive or defensive behaviours, as students appeared less comfortable to either:

- try to make themselves look better by making others look bad

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- fight off negative typifications.

Although, this research cannot conclude a definitive reason for this finding (and more research would need to be conducted in order to understand this phenomenon fully) I posit that such offensive and/or defensive behaviours are not deemed culturally acceptable within academia or the student body. Modest and deferential behaviour appears to be the norm (Schlenker and Leary, 1982) and I concur with Wosinka et al. (1996) that these attributes are deemed more favourable within friendship groups than arrogance or self-importance.

Adding to this point, key themes identified from the first research questions, showed students looking to their tutors for support, guidance and reassurance. It is logical, therefore, that students may want to approach their tutors cautiously and in ways to ingratiate them through "passive but friendly interaction" (Schütz, 1998). This corresponded to the way students generally spoke of their approach to DF. However, there were exceptions. For example, within David's interview, the extract below falls within the 'offensive self-presentation' category, as David attacked the source of criticism (i.e. his tutors) as a means of discrediting the judgement of the tutor (Schütz, 1998).

> David: I have met a couple of my tutors to discuss my feedback… when I've not been happy with it… over the last couple of years. Most recently was when the tutor had given really positive feedback but the mark was in the low 40s. I was like… er… how does that work? When I tackled her about this she made some excuse about her not being able to change the mark. I was going to exert my rights and make a complaint but didn't in the end. But I think more students, paying what we are paying, need to be confident to challenge things when they are not right.

David's language draws upon a range of modern consumer discourses including: service expectations, dissatisfaction, poor provider performance, payment and complaints. In doing so, he presents himself – theoretically at least – in a potentially powerful position, using the threat of "*making a complaint*" as reminder of this fact. This supports Carey's (2015) posit that "…education has become a commodity that the student purchases, with all the attendant assumptions of customer/provider relationship that this implies" (p.1).

A further point to note within the extract, is the way David questions why he received "*positive feedback*" when his grade was just a threshold pass (i.e. 40%). There are a number of possible interpretations of what happened here. Firstly, the feedback could have been "sugar-coated" and written in a style where the student was unable to decipher clearly the justification for the

weak mark. Alternatively, it could be argued that David has failed to fully grasp the purpose of feedback as not being a punitive act, where negative feedback should be given on those scripts where students are seen to under-perform. Regardless of the true interpretation of this incident, it is disappointing that the DF encounter left David either a) unclear why he failed or b) unsure as to how positive feedback – regardless of grade awarded – is a powerful feature in building learner resilience and motivation. Both, I argue, are features of high quality DF. As Carless et.al (2011) state:

> Dialogic approaches to assessment can guide students on what is good performance by facilitating discussions of quality in relation to specific assignment tasks, and also support them in developing enhanced ownership of assessment processes (p.397).

From establishing the existence of self-presentation behaviour within the data, I turn attention now to the question of why these students sub/consciously employed them within DF.

5.3 Self-branding

Within the commodified learning context of HE, students are introduced to a plethora of social and institutional norms and behaviours around which they are expected to navigate their learning identity. Hidden, as well as explicit, messages of the ideal student self are used within the commercial marketplace of HE to 'sell' universities principal product of knowledge, whilst reinforcing aspirations and benefits of becoming a graduate from their particular institution. University marketing strategies, promoting wider societal expectations that the outcome of university study is closely aligned to notions of successfully 'becoming'- transformed; self-fulfilled; employable and capable of confidently entering and contributing to society (Robson, 2002). As Davis (2003) observed:

> The new marketing scripts incorporate the language of self-determination and transformation, and build on the knowledge that being true to our unique inner selves is a powerful moral ideal… By purchasing the right workbook, following the right steps, or getting the right makeover, we can change the quality of our inner experience, enhance our psychological well-being, and finally achieve true self-fulfillment (p.45).

Thus, from the point of entry into university, undergraduates are under significant pressure to demonstrate that they are capable, committed and content – aligning to the positive attributes and orientation of 'graduateness'. This idealised version of the student-self is one that many students feel continually pressured to aspire to; it may be one that they believe is representative

within their own true self-conception. Ball (2004) highlights that, within the marketised HE sector, undergraduate students have developed sophisticated ways to 'self-commodify or self-brand' as a means of surviving and/or taking advantage of the performative pressures and expectations put upon them. Here, Ball (2004) describes self-branding as:

> …the reorganisation of our personal lives and relationships on the model of market relations. This adaptation is well illustrated by the recent practice of "personal branding", a strategy of cultivating a name and image of ourselves that we manipulate for gain (p.41).

The concept of self-branding is useful in helping to address the question of self-presentation behaviour within DF. I argue that when a student fails an assignment, they may feel in conflict with their self-brand. Self-presentation behaviour therefore helps, within the DF context, to protect and/or promote the self-conception as a means of managing and mediating the impression they project to their tutors (Hepper et al., 2010)

5.4 A gap in Schütz's (1998) taxonomy

Although not specifically designed to address self-presentation behaviour in university tutorials, Schütz's (1998) taxonomy was selected to be used in this research as it offered a detailed list of behaviour styles upon which the data could be understood. The four behaviour styles presented in the taxonomy, built upon earlier work of Jones and Pittman (1982), thus offered an updated model upon which the data could be interpreted. Further, the inclusion of typical behaviours (associated with each of the four main styles) in Schütz's (1998) taxonomy, acted as useful prompts to support the process of making-meaning from the data. However, I assert that not all typical behaviours were represented within the taxonomy and thus gaps were identified, as will now be discussed.

As stated, Schütz's (1998) taxonomy was useful in filtering, categorising and explaining most of the self-presentation behaviours found in the data. However, there were a number of types of behaviour that were similar in character yet did not fall neatly into her taxonomy. Within these 'uncategorised' behaviours, a fundamental feature connecting them was that they all included mention of the potential impact that the failed module might have upon their future aspirations/ambitions. Thus, an additional self-presentation behaviour type is needed, which I termed 'speculative ambition', meaning that – within the DF - the student makes direct reference to future ambition and/or aspiration, linking academic success as a pre-requisite.

Thus, by strategically mentioning how a module failure may impinge on their future ambitions (or indeed those of their family members/partners) the student exerts a kind of pressure on the tutor to 'be kind' to them. In doing so, the student may elicit empathy or sympathy from the tutor, deflecting attention away from the failed module and reducing the potential for further criticism of their self-conception. I also suggest that, within the speculative ambition strategy, students pass some of the responsibility and burden of their failure back onto the marking tutor, by binding them to their futures via the grade and feedback awarded.

Finally, I argue there is a gap in the self-presentation literature that does not address this new behaviour type. Jones and Pittman's (1982) did create a category in their taxonomy of self-presentation named 'supplication'. They argued that supplication occurs when individuals present their weaknesses or deficiencies to receive compassion and/or assistance from others. However, the new speculative ambition self-presentation strategy offered, builds upon this notion – making it both current and relevant to today's students, where employability and value for money both act as dominant discourses in a commodified and commercialised sector.

CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

7.1. Introduction

In this final chapter, I revisit the original research aim and questions and reflect upon them in light of discussions and literature presented in the previous chapters. Further, I outline the original contribution this research makes to knowledge, its potential impact on AFTs, and the implications for future policy, practice and research associated with DF. I also outline ways I intend to disseminate and share the research findings. The thesis closes with a reflection upon my own personal learning from the research journey.

The chapter is organised around the following sub-headings:

7.2 Reflection upon the research aim and questions

7.3 Speculative ambition self-presentation behaviour as contribution to knowledge

7.4 Plans for dissemination of research

7.5 Implications for practice

7.6 The future of the research

7.7 Limitations of the research

7.8 Reflections on personal learning

Before discussing the above areas, I make a number of assertions to contextualise the discussions. First, I fully acknowledge the dynamic nature of HE, with sector-specific policy, practice and theory that are ever evolving, and shaping new ways of approaching educational issues and problems. Thus, my research captures only a very brief moment in the development of the research topic and an even briefer moment in the lives of the participants. Second, my interpretations have been made without personal judgement or criticism of either the participants, tutors and/or the University to which they are associated. Rather, I have attempted to faithfully represent the participants' voices throughout the research process, ensuring the trustworthiness of my interpretations by carefully attending to my own ethical practice (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Finally, I re-assert that the research findings are not presented as being applicable or generalisable to a wider population of undergraduate students. This concluding chapter, however, intends to pose questions, possibilities and opportunities for other researchers and academics who may be able to relate the outcomes of this research to their own

context and students. As Smith and Osbourn (2007) state, it is at this point in the IPA research journey where:

> …the readers make links between the findings of an IPA study, their own personal and professional experience, and the claims in the extant literature. The power of the IPA study is judged by the light it sheds within this broader context (p.56).

7.2 Reflection upon the research aim and questions

Within this section, I offer a critical reflection on the outcomes of the research. I present my theoretical interpretations relating to the students' experiences and perceptions of DF, and discuss ways in which these holistically address the research aim and questions under the following sub-sections:

7.21 The influence of student performativity within the research findings

7.22 Students' experiences and perceptions of dialogic feedback

7.23 Self-presentation behaviour within dialogic feedback exchanges

7.24 Generative mechanisms within students' experiences of DF

7.21 The influence of student performativity within the research findings

As was argued in the opening chapter of this thesis, HE in England has undergone a period of radical and rapid change in recent years, "…particularly in relation to the funding of undergraduate study and, as with schooling, the diversity of provision" (Hillman, 2016, p.1). Fundamental to this shift has been the marketisation of the sector and the promotion of the student/consumer model (Brown, 205). Furedi (2011) expresses concern as to how this commercial and commodified relationship has realigned students' and tutors' roles, and states: "As customer, the student is expected to serve as the personification of market pressures on an otherwise archaic and unresponsive university. Since according to the logic of marketisation, the customer is always right, the university had better listen to the student" (p.5). As reported in Chapter 2, one of the areas in which there has been growing pressure from the student body, is for greater contact with tutors; specifically, students want more personalised support for assessments (NUS, 2012; 2015). This trend has been reflected and reported upon in the university in which I work and has led to a change to the University's assessment policy (e.g. In Year Module Retrieval).

Lynch (2012) argues that the ongoing neo-liberalisation of universities and the "…glorification of the 'consumer citizen', construed as willing, resourced and capable of making market-led choice" (p.96) has resulted in the creation of an idealised conception of the student-self: empowered, self-sufficient and confident. This idealised conception frames students' perspectives of behavioural and attitudinal norms, and permeates local policies and practices. Findings from my research identified that students' idealised behavioural and attitudinal norms also include expectations that they will take responsibility for their learning, engage with the assignment feedback, and take-up offers of voluntary support (i.e. AFT).

Critical to universities' outward facing market and their own performative and managerial agendas are academically successful students, who journey through their degree and into professional employment without interruption. This study's research findings highlighted how performative pressures were exerted from beyond the structures and mechanisms of the university machinery, for example, through peer competition, family/partner expectations, and aspirations of further study and employment, all of which contributed to a commodified and cognitivist view that learning is a product rather than a process. The central value and significance that participants placed upon the grade outcome of assessment was reinforced throughout the findings and framed the way in which all participants evaluated their learning progress, as well as how they conceived learning and their learner identity. The grade awarded also prompted students to rank their position, compared with others within their peer group, implying academic competition as a feature of HE study. From this rise in pressure for students to perform/gain high grades, the research concurs with MacFarlane's (2016) perspective that assessment practices in HE:

> …increasingly evaluate social and behavioural skills in a public learning space rather than individual intellectual understanding in a largely private one. Despite the purported benefits for student learning this performative turn is a cause for concern in undermining their freedom to make choices as learners and rewards game playing behaviours (p.13).

7.22 Students' experiences and perceptions of dialogic feedback

For the eight undergraduate participants in this research, their university learning journey was not always smooth or without significant personal challenge. The research findings indicate that, when students fail a module, they fall short of both their idealised version of the student-self and their high aspirations of their own learning. This finding supports Savin-Baden's (2008) argument that, as an outcome of this disjuncture, the affective dimension of their study

becomes inherently negative. The research findings also showed that such negativity results in low levels of motivation, confidence and self-belief, with the associated feelings of anxiety, frustration, apathy, embarrassment and shame impacting upon all aspects of the participants' lifeworld. At the point of receiving their assessment feedback on a failed piece of work, the research identified students as being in an aversive state (Bordia et al., 2004) where they experienced feelings of being stuck, isolated and/or confused. From these findings, the research supports arguments found in the literature, regarding the need for the affective dimension of students' engagement with feedback to be more closely attended to by those managing modular assessment (Värlander, 2008; Cazzell and Roriguez, 2011; Carless 2012). One such approach, detailed by Lipnevich and Smith (2008) is to offer written feedback to students in advance of releasing their percentage grade. Their research demonstrated that this staggered feedback practice lowered students' anxiety, whilst retaining positive levels of motivation to engage with the feedback to improve their work.

> The results indicated that students who were shown their grade scored significantly higher on the negative affect scale than their counterparts who did not receive their grade. Thus, the effect of the grade may have led students to become depressed about their performance, leading them to be less disposed to put forth the necessary effort to improve their work (p.34).

As a means of resolving these uncomfortable feelings and emotions, as well as addressing academic concerns regarding their assessment feedback, students sought DF through their marking tutor. The research showed that DF was mainly experienced within a voluntary system of guidance, known as an AFT. Analysis of students' experiences of DF within AFTs, demonstrated that the verbal interaction between student and tutor was akin to monologic and transmission modes of feedback. Within the AFT, students expected their tutor to lead the discussion by offering clarification, guidance, and – in some cases – tuition around errors made in the assignment. As such, DF was perceived predominantly by students as being tutor-centric, reinforcing traditional roles of student as novice and tutor as expert. The resulting asymmetric power relationship, experienced by students within the AFT, was neither rejected nor thought of negatively by participants. Indeed, the greater their tutor's correctional input and direct intervention, the higher the perceived value of the AFT, as it was understood to be more useful and effective in helping to address corrections and errors within their assessed work. Thus, the research findings demonstrated that, as students relied upon their tutors to fulfil a number of academic and pastoral roles, close intervention was understood as supportive and caring, rather than domineering and/or oppressive.

7.23 Self-presentation behaviour within dialogic feedback exchanges

Findings from the research demonstrate that students face a significant predicament when discussing weak and/or failed assignments with their tutors in AFTs. Their desire to self-promote and/or self-protect a confident and capable learner identity, not only conflicts with their own self-awareness of poor academic performance, but also with the tutor's expectations that students should take greater responsibility for their own learning and academic performance. As a means of managing this tension, and the emotional pressures that the unfamiliar experience of an AFT generates, the research has shown how students draw upon a range of self-presentational behaviours (Schütz, 1998) to manage how they project themselves to their tutor.

I argue that through the employment of self-presentation behaviour, students mask their true feelings, preventing the tutor from accessing insight into issues relating to their meta-cognition. Simultaneously, the monologic model of feedback, which focuses upon error correction and knowledge transmissions, reduces opportunities for both parties to openly explore students' meta development. As a result, although students may gain a sense of self-control in managing the immediate context of the AFT through employing self-presentation behaviour, longer-term learning needs may not be fully addressed.

7.24 Generative mechanisms within students' experiences of DF

I make further sense of the research findings by drawing upon Bhaskar's (1978) three tier conceptualisation of reality, previously presented in the literature chapter. I applied this conceptualisation to the outcomes of the data as a means of understanding the causal relationship between self-presentation behaviours and the impetus for them (i.e. generative mechanisms). By adapting Bhaskar's (1978) model (see below), I am able to understand the findings through a critical realist lens, thus aligning the research outcomes to my own ontological assumptions. My interpretation of Bhaskar's (1978) will now be discussed.

REAL DOMAIN
Pressure on students to perform, generative mechanisms of performativity

ACTUAL DOMAIN
Student self-presentation behaviours (including speculative ambition)
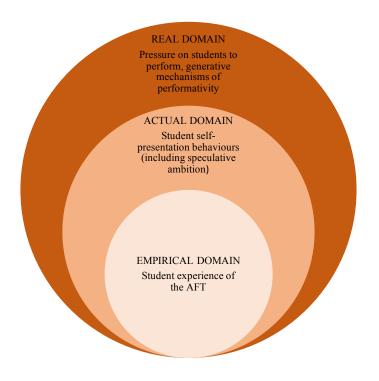
EMPIRICAL DOMAIN
Student experience of the AFT

Fig. 3   Bhaskar's (1978) adapted stratified model of ontology, showing how generative mechanisms relate to student self-presentation behaviours within AFTs.

Referring to the adapted model (see above), I argue that in the Real domain (i.e. the outer layer), generative mechanisms of student performativity are created by the pervasive, summative assessment systems and structures present within the HE system. Through learning being perceived by students as a product, the importance of the grade outcome and of graduating with a 'good' degree are both reinforced. Such performative pressure drives students to create a self-brand (Ball, 2004; 2012), projecting an outward appearance closely reflecting an idealised conception of a student-self that is confident, capable and content.

Specifically, I argue that the generative mechanisms can be further understood through the expectation and aspirations students perceive are placed on them by tutors, family, friends, employers and, critically, themselves. Following on from this, I argue that these generative mechanisms are framed by negative emotions and feelings associated with the assignment failure, thus acting as drivers for self-presentation behaviours within the Actual domain (i.e. the middle layer). These self-presentation behaviours, sometimes observable and sometimes hidden, exist as a means of protecting and/or promoting the students' outward impression presented to those around them. Lastly, within the Empirical domain (i.e. central layer), is the

AFT itself: the student's experience of meeting with the marking tutor to engage in DF regarding their feedback. Within this domain, the student will experience the physical setting of the AFT and their personal engagement with their tutor. It is also within the Empirical domain that the tutor may observe the students' self-presentation behaviours.

Through bringing this conceptualisation to the fore, tutors and students could become more aware of the kinds of negative generative pressures creating self-presentation behaviour in AFTs and what impact these may be having upon the student's learning and learner identity. Such shared awareness could ensure a high degree of trust, honesty and openness within the DF exchange, helping the tutor to target ways in which to scaffold support for students' self-confidence, self-worth and self-efficacy.

7.3 Speculative ambition self-presentation behaviour as contribution to knowledge

This research makes contribution to knowledge through the identification of a previously unacknowledged self-presentation style – which I term 'speculative ambition' behaviour. This behaviour, and the meanings inherent within it, does not appear within the self-presentation literature. Thus, in presenting speculative ambition, I aim to not only extend Schütz's taxonomy (1998), but also to contribute to the wider research literature pertaining to self-presentation.

The research showed how 'speculative ambition' behaviour is reflected in participants' talk of their high aspirations for graduation, future employment and/or further study. With this type of behaviour, the individual highlights the insecurity of their future prospects, brought on by their failed assignment, as a means of influencing the interaction between themselves and their tutor within   the AFT.   This finding was demonstrated through students' raising concerns in the AFT   as to how their failed assignment may have long-term negative consequences on their ambitions, aspirations and/or dreams. In doing so, students also drew upon the negative impact that a failed academic profile would have upon significant others (e.g. parents, partners and peers) both in their short and long-term futures. In displaying such speculative ambition behaviour, students (consciously or otherwise) attempted to exert an emotional pressure on their tutors, in the hope that they would treat them more kindly, sympathetically and/or leniently. Further, I argue that by employing this behaviour, students share with their tutor some of the burden of the failure. Essentially, by making direct connections between the failed assignment and their future ambitions and aspirations, students exert pressure upon their tutors (consciously or otherwise) to support them in rectifying the situation.

In keeping with the format and content of Schütz's taxonomy (1998), I identified a number of typical behaviours associated with the speculative ambition style. These include students:

- Making direct references to future ambition and aspiration, linking academic success as a pre-requisite to achieving these.
- Highlighting to their tutor how academic failure could negatively impact upon others.
- Suggesting a degree of helplessness and hopelessness regarding rectifying the situation, thus reluctantly resigning themselves to a less than ambitious future.

I argue that this new category of self-presentation style is exacerbated by the ongoing neo-liberal discourses in the English HE sector, and thus contributes to theoretical discussion of how student behaviour is being influenced more broadly, by performativity and the pressures it exerts to studying at higher level.

In summary of this reflection upon the outcomes of the research, I argue in favour of Giroux's (1988) belief that dialogue in learning should be nothing less than a "language of possibility". It is not merely "…a technical exercise; it involves identity work that reveals and constructs who one is, and is becoming" (Renshaw, 2004, p.4). For such transformational experiences to happen, however, the quality of dialogue needs to be in equal parts, both challenging and supportive. Trusting, co-constructive relationships, between tutor and student must be first established, so that both parties are secure in their understanding of their roles and responsibilities within and beyond the AFT. Dialogue around feedback should not focus solely upon 'correcting errors' or 'checking feedback' (which might be necessary to include). Rather, I would argue, DF practices must be carefully considered and planned for, as failure to do so could result in 'bolt on' monologic verbal forms of information transmission. From the findings, it was shown that when DF is not embedded within a curriculum - where dialogue is central to design, content, delivery and assessment processes - it can serve to further reinforce traditional, asymmetric power relations and student passivity. Indeed, if the quality of the verbal exchange is over-reliant on the process of merely giving and receiving corrections, then it is difficult for it to be considered truly dialogic.

7.4   Plans for dissemination of research

On completion of my doctoral study, I intend to maintain professional research impetus through the active dissemination of the findings. From the production of research papers and conference presentations, the outcomes will be shared more widely, reaching an international research community who have similar interests.   This will be achieved through the support of an experienced colleague/research mentor. I also aim to make direct contact, via professional associations, social media and conference attendance, with internationally recognised academics whose work has inspired much of this thesis (e.g. Kay Sambell, Maggi Savin-Baden, David Carless and David Nicol). In doing so, I hope to broaden my network of professional researchers.   I am also submitting my application for a Higher Education Academy Senior Fellowship in 2018 and the outcomes of this research will form the basis of that application.

Locally, my own university offers significant opportunity for researchers to develop their research profiles. I am already a member of the University's Doctoral College, which actively promotes opportunity for Early Career Researchers (ECR). I aim to present my findings at the next ECR Conference and have been invited to lead a workshop at the University-wide Learning and Teaching Conference in the summer of 2018. Within my School, I am a member of the Higher Education Pedagogies and Policy Research cluster, which will form a useful network of colleagues across the university, with whom I can share the findings from this research. I have been invited to lead the keynote opening address at our School's next post-graduate conference for Masters and Doctoral students, which I hope will be an opportunity not only to disseminate the outcomes of the research, but also to share my own reflections on completing the research journey and encouraging others to do so.

7.5   Implications for practice

The outcomes of this study have led me to reflect upon my own practice. Here, I offer three pedagogic developments that have been directly informed by this research.

First, I believe there needs to be professional development and/or preparation opportunities for both tutors and students, to understand the types of pressures (academic and emotional) that may be generated when students talk about assessment feedback with their tutor. I suggest that any such development opportunity should take account of the kinds of self-presentational behaviours that might emerge within such conversations and ways in which these may be identified, understood and managed. Critical to this suggestion, would be the sharing of good

practice models of feedback (e.g. Nicol, 2101; Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick, 2009; Yang and Carless, 2013), which all stress the central importance of the power of dialogue in supporting students' confidence to self-regulate their learning.

Second, as a tutor leading AFTs with undergraduate students, I have already begun to adapt aspects of my practice through setting students a short reflective task to complete prior to attending the AFT. Within this task, individuals are invited to take time to reflect upon their feelings having received a weak/failed grade, and to consider how these feelings might impact upon their approach to the AFT and their feedback. In the email sent to students prior to the AFT, I have deliberately left the instructions open to their interpretation, but alerted them to the fact that the AFT will start by discussing any aspects of their reflection they wish to share with me. I have been conscious of maintaining the focus on learning (and not therapy or counselling) yet – this said – I am keen not to ignore the negative affective dimension, which I have reported in this research as having causal affect upon students' self-presentation behaviour within the AFT. To date, four students have engaged in this activity and, although the practice needs to be implemented more widely and evaluated thoroughly, my first impressions of the activity are positive in that it offers an 'ice-breaker' for the participants and for their deeper learning. I will seek to follow-up this pilot with a more detailed research project, potentially linked to the University's new IYMR policy.

Third, I argue that future validation of modules and/or courses within my institution should show tangible evidence of how tutors intend to support students' understanding of their role in the assessment and feedback process. This should include broadening the DF opportunity to all students, within a carefully planned timetable of formative feedback. Thus, a more holistic view of progress and development would be provided for both the students and tutor teams. This objective – for all students to receive DF – could be reached by the inclusion of more active learning approaches, where ongoing dialogue with their tutors and peers is accepted as an essential feature (e.g. enquiry-based learning).

7.6 Implications for policy

From the findings, I would argue that, within the School of Education at my university, there is a need for a systematic review as to how undergraduate students are supported in engaging

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with their feedback. As a means of improving students' self-confidence and feelings of empowerment, I suggest the following developments to policy:

- Course teams to create frequent and sustained opportunities for students to act in partnership with their tutors, regarding the ways in which assessment and feedback policies and practices are created and implemented into their course.

- Module tutors to provide students with increased space and time to read and reflect upon the written feedback by returning the grade after the written feedback (i.e. a staggered approach to releasing feedback information).

- Course teams to encourage students to respond to their tutors' assessment feedback by making a requirement for them to write a short reflection, submitted as part of their subsequent assignment, addressing points raised in their previous work. This could be in the form of a short statement included within an introduction/conclusion or completed on a separate reflective cover sheet.

- Modules tutors to provide in and out of class opportunities for small group learning and/or peer support as a means of promoting self-direction and self-correction.

- Students to meet with their personal tutors at the end of each of the two semesters, to lead discussion of key developments in their learning. This could be in the form of a collective review of the challenges, successes and actions that students felt they had encountered, and ways in which they intend to approach their learning in the following semester.

In addition to the above, with specific reference to the new In Year Module Retrieval (IYMR) policy within my own institution (see Chapter 2), I would suggest that students could be offered a pre-meeting with their personal tutor – before their IYMR AFT – as a means of helping them to prepare more fully. Such a meeting could help first-year students address feelings of their failure as well as understand better the purpose of the AFT and, within it, their role and that of the tutor.

7.7 The future of the research

As gaps within the literature demonstrate, there remains much to learn about students' engagement in self-presentation behaviours within DF and, specifically, within the context of AFTs or similar feedback tutorials. This study has raised a number of further questions in need

of research, both within UoB's new IYMR policy for first years (see above) and, more broadly, relating to AFTs for students in their second and final years of undergraduate study. Future research could focus on:

1. How are the terms 'dialogue' and 'dialogic feedback' understood by tutors in HE?
2. How do students/tutors understand self-presentation behaviour within DF?
3. What influence and/or impact do students/tutors feel self-presentation behaviour has upon students':
   a. learning progress?
   b. engagement with feedback?
   c. relationship with their tutor?
   d. learner identity?
4. What is the relationship between self-presentation behaviour in AFTs and the development of students' ability to self-regulate their learning?

Finally, I raise three further considerations for future research:

5. Research into the 'speculative ambition' self-presentation style to deepen understanding of its characteristics and potential implications on students' learning.
6. Explore the practice of asking students to self-reflect upon their emotions and feelings prior to the AFT meeting. This research could be framed by a critical realist approach (Bhaskar, 1978), and seek to address the relationship between negative generative mechanisms and self-reflection in the management of student experiences of DF.
7. Although this research has focused upon DF and self-presentation behaviour within an undergraduate context, I suggest that it could also be extended to other areas of HE, for example Masters and Doctoral study. In doing so, data from different levels of study could be compared and contrasted as a means of understanding the shared – as well as specific – learning experiences and needs of students.

7.8   Limitations of the research

Overall, I consider the IPA methodology adopted for this research was appropriate in addressing the research aims and questions. It reflected my critical realist ontology, whilst also affording significant opportunity for interpretation and meaning-making. Thus, I found the approach to be both creative and pragmatic, making it fitting for professional research within

social science. A further strength of the methodology was the flexibility it afforded and the degree of choice it presented to me as the researcher. This included: the number of participants invited; the level of reporting decided upon (i.e. individual and/or themed) and the fieldwork methods selected. From a personal perspective, I enjoyed working within a flexible research framework that – although guided by strong philosophical principles - encourages personal adaptation to suit the needs of the research project being undertaken (Smith and Osbourn, 2007). However, even within a carefully planned piece of IPA research, I fully acknowledge the "notoriously problematic and complex pursuit of accessing the 'experience' of individual persons" (Larkin et.al, 2006, p. 108).

Reflecting upon the research project, the following limitations are offered.

7.81 The analysis

A key challenge within the analysis of the data was the dual pressure to ensure the individual participant voice was fully acknowledged, whilst searching for connections between and across themes. As Collins and Nicolson (2002), state "…the search for connections, similarities or divergences across cases can miss a potentially richer seam of data, that of a contextualised, unfolding and sequential account within a single interview" (p. 627). With eight participants, each generating a plethora of rich data to analyse and order, finding ways of managing the balance between individual and collective data was a significant challenge. Upon reflection, projected time scales for this part of the analytical process were not realistic and thus in need of modification. Specifically, stages four and five of the analytical process required a longer time frame.

7.82 The number of participants

I acknowledge that, as the number of participants included in this research was relatively small (i.e. 8), the reported findings were limited and non-generaliseable. However, this does not negate the value of the research nor the eight student voices that contributed to it. The study closely followed Smith et al.'s (2009) broad advice regarding the number of participants that might be included within a Doctoral level IPA piece of research. I elected to use eight students, which is at the top end of what Smith et. al (2009) advise, as I wanted to include as broad a diversity of experiences as possible. However, this posed a challenge as a significant corpus of rich data was generated, which made it difficult at times to balance the idiosyncratic and more

general/themed levels of analysis/discussion. The word count of the thesis also acted as a limitation here, in that it was impossible to offer a full account of each of the eight students, which would have been my preference. I would take this limitation into account in any future IPA research I conduct.

7.83 The timing of participants' experiences of DF

Although all participants were second-year students undertaking the same undergraduate degree course, some of them had not experienced an AFT since their first year of study. Other participants had engaged in an AFT more recently within their second year of study. This created a potential limitation, in that some students were expected to recount memories of the DF phenomena from much further back in their study, which may have impacted upon accuracy of recall (Lindseth and Norberg, 2004). However, due to the challenges of recruiting participants, I had to accept this limitation. In future, I feel this factor would need more careful consideration, and that it may be preferable to hold the research interviews as close as possible to the experience of DF (i.e. within three weeks of students having their summative assessments returned).

7.84 Data collection methods

The research followed Smith et al.'s (2009) recommended approach for data collection by using semi-structured interviews in the fieldwork. However, upon reflection, I feel my interpretations may have benefitted from the inclusion of some adaptations to the data collection method. For example:

- In the scoping interview, participants could have been asked to bring both their essay and graded feedback sheet linked to the AFT. I feel such an addition may have helped to prompt those students who experienced DF in their first year of study.

- With student's/tutor's permission and ethical clearance from the University, I would have liked to have observed AFTs as a means of gaining deeper insight into the context in which self-presentation behaviours occurred. If I were to pursue this adaptation, would take into account my presence in the AFT and the potential impact it could have upon students' self-presentation behaviour.

7.85 Potential limitations of employing a taxonomy to support data analysis

I argue that a possible limitation of employing a taxonomy as a framework to support the process of data analysis is that it has the potential to constrain the researcher into seeking only those categories listed within the given typology. It could also restrict the researcher further, if the category types listed within the selected taxonomy are not fully or accurately representative of the topic area under investigation. Finally, I argue that if taxonomies are employed without careful consideration, they could act to deviate the researcher away from the content of the data and/or elicit a false process of categorisation. However, with regards to this research, I believe having conducted the analysis using Smith et al.'s (1999) six-step process, my sustained engagement and familiarity with the data helped to mitigate some of these potentially negative limitations.

7.9   Reflections on personal learning

In a somewhat 'brave' attempt to become a "…connoisseur of my own thinking" (Janesnick, 1998, p.3) I followed the advice of my supervisors and kept a research journal throughout my doctoral study. In compiling this closing section, I decided to read back through each of the four journals to help the process of critical reflection upon milestones encountered on the journey. From completing this surprisingly emotional exercise, I reflect here upon one of the most significant developments in my personal learning.

As an IPA researcher, interpretation was at the heart of my analysis. Reporting the revelations of participants, whilst interpreting my own understanding of their meaning, involved working with and within the double hermeneutic. During this process, wrestling with the multiple levels of interpretations (and the potential meaning I was attempting to make of them) provoked feelings of frustration, bewilderment and defeat. I found myself frequently agreeing with the sentiments of the Cheshire Cat in Alice in Wonderland, "If you don't know where you are going, any road can take you there!"

However, after reading a paper by van Manen and Adams (2009) entitled 'The Phenomenology of Space in Writing Online' and considering the conceptual arguments regarding the phenomenology of writing that they put forward, I was able to 'unlock' the many moments of writer's block that plagued the early stages of my analysis. In their paper, van Manen and Adams (2009) argue that: "Writing is not the practice of some clever technique; neither is writing restricted to the moment where one sets pen to paper, or fingers to the keyboard.

Writing has already begun, so to speak, when one has managed to enter the space of the text, the textorium." (p.20). This quote had significant impact upon how I understood my researcher/learner identity, as it led me to question where and how I was doing my research writing and what I was expecting from those moments of intense study.

The journal entries reflected the reality of my own pressurised world of being a part-time researcher, in a full-time, highly demanding job. Research time was precious and when it was 'snatched' from all the other competing demands in my life, it often felt 'output driven' and focused upon 'producing', through the act of putting words on paper. From this reflection, I realised that rather than stepping into the space of the textorium, I was in danger of stepping away from it as a means of managing external deadlines. I recognised here that I needed to re-align my understanding of the writing process to take greater account of the 'space of the textorium'. As Blanchot (1982) states, the most valuable text is often that which is "…in immediate proximity; which seizes and ceaselessly draws [us] close, even though it leaves [us] absolutely at a distance" (p. 32).

Becoming conscious of the fact that the most important and valuable data for the phenomenological researcher is both "in immediate proximity" whilst – at the same time – "absolutely at a distance" helped me to manage the demands of working with and within the double hermeneutic. In these moments, gaining deeper insight and interpretation from the data was not simply via an act of analytical writing but rather a more meta-physical test of embracing my own understanding as well as its limitations.

7.91 Final thoughts

This research journey began by introducing the words of Lucy, a student union representative who explained the complexities and challenges that some students face when discussing assessment feedback with their tutors.

> Lucy: Yeah. Meeting your tutor to talk about your assignment grade, does bring up a lot of feelings and stuff. But it is really helpful… Hmm. But, err… it's not straightforward especially when you are talking about your work with the person who marked it. And…hmm… especially if the work has failed or you're not pleased with it...or the grade you've been given. I know we're all adults but… it's complicated – from a student's point of view...it can be the last thing you want to do. Even if you know you should and it'll be good for you… You don't want to always face the music!

Lucy's words became something of the 'stone in the shoe' at the start of this research: a troublesome impetus that ignited my deep desire to understand what was meant by "facing the music" from the student perspective. I realised early on in the research journey that my own assumptions, experiences and bias (all of which could have 'answered' Lucy question swiftly) would be tested and challenged. Upon reflection, it has been these moments where the most impactful learning and personal growth has taken place.

Having been immersed in the research approach of IPA, I now 'see', process and interpret Lucy's talk differently: taking account of what she is expressing as a construction of her reality whilst, at the same time, making my own meaning of her words. Although I still have no single 'answer' or 'response' to the tensions Lucy raises, I find myself critically engaging with her words from a more informed position, with greater empathy, insight and theoretical reasoning.

The research findings have been directly informed by both the individual and collective voices, experiences and perceptions of the students who participated in this study. As the outcome of my research will be actively shared within my own professional community and beyond, these voices of the past will continue to impact upon future cohorts and their learning experiences. They will also stay with me throughout the remainder of my teaching and research career, informing my practice and engagement with future DF policy developments. It is within this evolution of praxis, that I believe the power of professional research to be found: "This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a praxis" (Freire, 2004, p.65).

In closing my thesis, I draw once again upon the words of T. S. Eliot (1943), whose words so fittingly introduced the study and, here, acutely encapsulate its ending.

> We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive
> where we started and know the place for the first time.

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Appendix 1: Interview schedule for scoping interview

No.	Area of concern	Interview question	Prompt questions
1	Introduction - preamble	Can you introduce yourself, sharing something of your background and reasons for studying?	Why did you select the programme you are on? What are your future ambitions?
2	Making the decision to request an AFT.	Can you tell me what motivated you to request an AFT?	When and/or how did you decide? Where there any challenges or barriers to making this decision? Who usually requests AFTs and for what purpose?
3	Understanding students' expectations.	What did you hope for in the AFT? How do you understand the term dialogue? What do you think dialogic feedback is?	Had you considered what you wanted from the AFT before you arranged it? Did you plan anything in advance? Had you considered what you wanted from the AFT and/or tutor before you arranged it? Did you plan anything in advance?
4	Organising and managing an AFT.	Can you tell me about how you went about arranging the tutorial?	What was the process? How did you know this?
5	Setting the AFT agenda.	Can you describe how the content or agenda of the AFT was decided and by whom?	When was this agreed? How (if at all) was this communicated and by whom?
6	Meeting with the tutor.	Can you describe the interaction between you and the tutor in the AFT?	What did you talk about in the AFT? Who lead the AFT? How much did each participant contribute?
7	Describing an experience of an AFT.	Can you describe a recent AFT?	How were you feeling during the AFT?
8	Engaging in discussion about feedback.	Can you describe how you felt when discussing your feedback with your tutor?	How was the feedback referred to and in what context? How did this make you feel?
9	Comparing DF to other experiences of feedback.	How does this form of feedback compare to other forms of feedback (e.g. written)?	Can you talk through other forms of feedback you have experienced at University and how you found them?
10	Reflecting upon the tutor's comments given by the tutor.	Can you tell me what happened after the AFT had finished?	Did you follow-up the discussion after the AFT? Why? Why not? Did you re—engage with the tutor and/or the feedback after the AFT?
11	Checking student has had the opportunity to add their own voice	Is there anything you feel you would like to add or explain further?	Have you felt like you have said what you wanted to say? Would you like to return to any topics or clarify anything you have said?

Appendix 2: Interview schedule for follow-up interview

No.	Area of concern	Interview question	Prompt questions
1	Student role in DF	Can you describe how you see your role in DF?	What was your role in the DF? Was it as you expected?
2	Tutor's role in DF	What did you expect of your marking tutor in the DF? Could any of your other tutors (e.g. personal tutor) lead the AFT?	Was there anything that you specifically expected your tutor to do before, during or after the DF?
3	Student/tutor relationship	Thinking back to the AFTs you experienced, how would you describe your relationship with your marking tutor?	Did your grade and/or feedback influence and/or impact upon your relationship with the marking tutor? Did it change the relationship? If so, how?
4	Other support	Did you seek support understanding your assessment feedback from anyone other than your tutor?	Either inside or outside of the university, was there anyone else you spoke to for support?
5	Peer group	Did you involve any of your peer group in your decision to request an AFT?	Did you disclose to your peer group you were going for an AFT? If so, how did they react?
6	Feelings before the DF	Can you describe to me the moment you received your failed/weak grade?	What was your emotional response to receiving the grade? What were the first things that went through your mind?
7	Emotions during the DF	Thinking back to actually being in the AFT, can you describe how you felt?	How were you feeling during the DF experience?
8	Feelings after the DF	When the AFT had ended, how did you feel?	What were your emotions on leaving the AFT?
9	Resolving feelings	How did you manage your feelings during this period of time?	Did you have any personal strategies to help you manage your feelings?
10	Reflecting upon self as a learner.	Did the AFT impact upon the way you saw your learning and/or yourself as a learner?	Did you notice any changes in the way you approached your learning after the AFT?
11	Participant voice	Is there anything you feel you would like to add or explain further?	Have you felt like you have said what you wanted to say? Would you like to return to any topics or clarify anything you have said?

Appendix 3: Invitation to participate in research

UNIVERSITY OF BRIGHTON

Research title: Undergraduate students' experiences and perceptions of dialogic feedback

Dear student,

I am currently a full-time lecturer at the University of Brighton, School of Education. As part of my Educational Doctoral study (EdD), I am researching undergraduate students' experiences and perceptions of dialogic feedback. My focus is upon ways in which second-year students have experienced dialogic feedback within their degree course and their responses to it.

In order gain this insight, I would like to conduct interviews with second-year students, studying on your course, **who have experienced at least one assessment feedback tutorial at their time at the University**. To clarify, assessment feedback tutorials are those voluntary, one-to-one meetings that occur between student and marking tutor to discuss assignment grade and feedback.

I am looking to interview 8 students in total. Each participant will be invited to attend two interviews. The first, will explore some general questions, covering how dialogic feedback has been experienced on your degree course. The second, which will happen approximately 3/4 weeks after the first, will explore themes/issues identified and raised in the first interview. However, importantly, the interview will be led by what each student sees as important and relevant to their experience.

Each interview will last for approximately 60 – 90 minutes. Dates and venues for the two interviews will be arranged according to what is most convenient for each participant.

Within the research process all transcripts will be:

- anonymised and a pseudonym will be used in place of your real name;
- be recorded on a small digital audio recorder and later transcribed. Audio recordings and transcriptions will be stored as password protected files.

Initially, the research will be produced as part of my EdD. However, there may be further academic publications beyond that point. Please see the accompanying 'Participant Information sheet' for more details of how the research will be conducted.

If you have any further questions, regarding the interview process, then please do ask.

If you would like to be part of my research, and **have experienced at least one assessment feedback tutorial during your time at University,** then please email me – R.P.Wallis@brighton.ac.uk - using the template shown below.

If you have not **experienced at least one assessment feedback tutorial during your time at the University**, then may I thank you for your reading this initiation and wish you well in the remainder of your study.

With thanks,

Researcher's name: Richard Wallis
School of Education
University of Brighton
Tel: 01273 643319
Email: R.P.Wallis@brighton.ac.uk

Supervisor's name: Associate Professor Carol Robinson
School of Education
University of Brighton
Email: C.Robinson@brighton.ac.uk

Email reply:

I would like to become a research participant.

I have read the details of the research given on the 'Participant Information Sheet' and understand what my involvement will entail.

I have experienced: [ ] (please insert number) assessment feedback tutorials on the following dates [ ].

Full name:_____

Alternative email address: _____

Appendix 4: Participant information sheet

UNIVERSITY OF BRIGHTON

Research title: Undergraduate students' experiences and perceptions of dialogic feedback

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of second-year undergraduate students' perceptions and experiences of dialogic feedback (DF). Specifically, I aim to explore DF within the context of assessment feedback tutorials experienced during your time at University.

Why have I been invited to participate?

Initially, I have invited all second-year students on your programme to provide an expression of interest in being part of the research. However, from the responses I gather, 8 students will be selected to participate. This is the target number that fits my particular research method. Selection will be based upon:

a) gaining an equal representation of female and male students;

b) availability to attend interviews.

Do I have to take part?

No. It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you are selected to participate you will be given a copy of this information sheet to keep and asked to sign a short consent form. However, if you change your mind at any time, you are free to withdraw without giving me a reason. Regardless if you participate or not in this research, there will be no impact on your marks, assessments or future studies at the University of Brighton.

What will happen to me if I take part?

The research will take the form of two, semi-structured interviews that will each last for approximately 60-90 minutes. In the interview you will be asked, by myself, some questions relating to your experiences of assessment feedback tutorials. It is important to remember there is no 'right' or 'wrong' in your thoughts and there will be no 'trick' or 'hidden' questions. However, if at any time you do not wish to contribute your thoughts in the interviews, then please indicate this to me. I hope this reassures you that at no time should you feel pressured or expected to say something.

What are the possible disadvantages and/or risks of taking part in the research?

I do not perceive there to be any disadvantages and/or risks to you in being part of this research. This has been validated and agreed by the University's Ethics' Committee. However, if anything discussed in the interview leads you to feeling upset and/or worried, then please do contact the University's Student Support and Counselling Services. Details of these services can be found on the following University web-page: https://www.brighton.ac.uk/current-students/my-student-life/health-and-wellbeing/need-to-speak-to-someone/index.aspx

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

I do not perceive there to be any direct or immediate benefits to taking part in the research. However, I believe having the chance to reflect upon your study is always a useful experience.

Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?

All information collected will be kept strictly confidential (subject to legal limitations). Your privacy and anonymity will be ensured in the writing, collection and storage of all research material. I will use pseudonyms in place of your real names and change any traceable details, as appropriate.

Will the interviews be recorded?

Both interviews will be audio tape recorded to ensure that what I am reporting (within my thesis) is entirely accurate and a true reflection of what you say. I will only use the data for the purposes of my research. All data will be kept secure whilst I am conducting my study and it will be deleted on completion.

What should I do if I want to take part?

If you would like to take part in the research, then please email me back (see e-mail invitation) indicating your interest. I will then reply to arrange agreed dates and venues for the two interviews.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the research will be used to complete my doctoral thesis. The thesis may be viewed by other academics and/or students. However, as already stated, please be assured that your anonymity will be preserved.

Who has reviewed the study?

The study has been reviewed by my supervisor, Associate Professor Carol Robinson (University of Brighton). Please see her contact details below if you have any concerns about this research.

Thank you for taking time to read the information sheet and considering to be part of my research.

Richard Wallis

Contact for further Information

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Appendix 5: Pen portraits of participants

Conor	Conor is focused on gaining a high-quality degree i.e. either a 2:1 or 1st classification. He has a clear vocational aspiration of wanting to work in the Department for Education, producing policy and guidance. Conor feels the undergraduate degree he is on will help to develop a deep understanding of a range of educational topics that could serve him well in the future. Conor plans to use the degree programme's placement opportunity to gain experience working at one of the Government's educational offices. Conor failed one assignment in year 1 of his study. Thus, he experienced one AFT during his time at University.
Debbie	Prior to coming to university, Debbie had completed her secondary and sixth-form years with a strong academic profile. Her choice to study on the programme was, in part, to do with her interest in the subject study of education but also as a means of keeping her future employment options open. She cited that the variety of modules offered on the course, as well as the opportunity to study on placement, were key factors as to why she chose the programme. Debbie expressed that the university was her first choice, as was the programme she was accepted on. Debbie failed two assignments. Both in her first year of study. She experienced two AFTs during her time at University.
David	David left school with no plans of going to university. He is the first generation in his family to attend university. His earlier intention was to join his family's firm. However, David made a late decision to apply to university based on a developing interest in working with children categorised as having additional learning needs. This change in professional direction was sparked by the time he spent working in a support role at a summer camp for primary aged children with physical disabilities. David failed two assignments. One in year 1 and one in year 2 of his study. He requested AFTs for both failures, plus two further AFTs to discuss weak/low marks.
Jenny	Jenny is a mature student, who has a young family. Before entering HE, she studied for an Access course at a further education college. Her ultimate aim is to become a Primary school teacher. However, on her first application to the University, she was not accepted onto the initial teacher education programme. She then applied to do an undergraduate degree, in the hope of completing a postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) on graduation. Jenny failed two assignments. One in her first year of study and one in her second year. She experienced two AFTs during her time at University.

Lisa	Lisa is a mature student. She embarked on the degree course with little knowledge of what she wanted to do with the degree at the point of graduation. Her love for learning and challenging herself were the key motivating factors to study. More recently, Lisa has begun to consider post-graduate study, specifically, the full-time MA Education or a further qualification in educational psychology. Lisa failed one assignment in her first year of study. She experienced one AFT during her time at University.
Teresa	Teresa enjoys the academic challenge of the degree and the social side of university. She aims to work in reception or nursery classes on graduating. She hopes to gain some initial experience as a learning support assistant or teaching assistant in her first year of graduating before deciding whether to return to the university to complete a post-graduate certificate in teacher education. Teresa failed one assignment in her second year of study. She experienced one AFT during her time at University.
Matt	Matt came to University having completed a year working abroad for a non-government organisation. Prior to that, Matt had no breaks in his education and entered university with three A-levels. Matt is unclear as to what he wants to do after university, however, he expressed interest in continuing to do a Masters in Education in London and then work for a large charity or international relief agency. Matt failed two assignments. One in his first year of study and one in his second year. He experienced two AFTs during her time at University.
Tom	Tom only recently begun to consider a career in teaching. He is yet to decide on whether he would like to teach in secondary school (Religious Education) or Sociology in a Sixth Form College. Regardless, he realises he will need to complete a subject enhancement course at the end of his undergraduate degree, if he is going to be able to pursue either route. He has a young family, so gaining employment swiftly after his study is a priority. Tom failed one assignment in his second year of study and experienced one AFT during his time at University.

Appendix 6: Participant consent form

Adapted from University of Brighton, Guidance on issues in research ethics (Version 2. July 2016)

Research title: Undergraduate students' experiences and perceptions of dialogic feedback

Please tick to confirm: ✓

☐   I agree to take part in this research that aims to explore my experiences and perceptions of dialogic feedback on my course.

☐   The researcher has explained to my satisfaction the purpose, principles and procedures of the study and the possible risks involved.

☐   I have read the information sheet and I understand the principles, procedures and possible risks involved.

☐   I am aware that I will be required to attend 2 interviews, each lasting approximately 60-90 minutes.

☐   I agree to the researcher making audio recordings during the interviews.

☐   I understand how the data collected will be used, and that any confidential information will normally be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else.

☐   I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without incurring consequences from doing so.

☐   I agree that should I withdraw from the study, the data collected up to that point may be used by the researcher for the purposes described in the information sheet.

☐   I agree that data collected may subsequently be archived and used by other bona fide researchers.

Please ask if you have any concerns and/or queries before you begin your interview.

Thank you.

Name (please print)……………………………………………………………

Signed…………..…………………………………………………………………..

Date …………………………………………………………………..................

Appendix 7: Example transcribed scoping interview (Jenny)

Key:

R = Researcher
J = Jenny

LINE	EMERGENT			INTERVIEW	EXPLORATORY
1.		R		**Firstly, thank you for coming in to talk with me today and agreeing to be part of my research.**	
2.		R		**I hope you are happy with all the arrangements?**	
3.		J		*Yes. Thank you. I am more than happy with everything.*	Hands over signed consent form.
4.		J		*I've signed my consent form and read the information sheet you sent in your email.*	
5.		R		**Thank you. As you know, I am looking to understand undergraduate students' experiences of assessment feedback tutorials on their course…**	
6.		J		*Yes. How interesting! I never thought people would research things like that…*	Relevance
7.		J		*But I think it's really relevant to us [students] isn't it? I mean, if it's about the support we get – then nothing is more important. So, yes, I'm really pleased to be involved.*	Student support Acknowledges AFTs
8.		J		*I know what feedback tutorials are so I'm happy to share my experiences, if you think it'll help?*	
9.		R		**Thank you. Please do feel free to say anything you wish in the interview.**	
10.		R		**As you know, this first one will cover broad experiences of the assessment feedback tutorials that you have attended.**	
11.		R		**Then the second interview – in about three weeks' time - will follow-up some of the things we talk about today. Is that OK?**	
12.		J		*I'm more than happy with that. I've got the date in my diary for that second interview.*	
13.		R		**Ok…before we begin, can you please introduce yourself, sharing something of your background and some reasons for why you decided to choose the course you are now studying on.**	Ethics. Pen portrait details to be published.
14.		R		**This will be added to the thesis, so please only share what you are entirely happy with others knowing. Is that OK?**	

15.		J	*Of course, yes. That's OK. I'm a mature student. I've got one child, who's still at school.*	Pen-portrait details agreed.
16.		J	*Hmm...I did an Access course - at a further education college - before coming here. And...err... I'm really happy to be on the course.*	
17.		**R**	**Do you know what you would like to do once you graduate?**	
18.	Future ambition	J	*Yes. I'm really clear as to what I want to do. I've always wanted to be a primary school teacher you see – so that's the dream.*	Primary PGCE Long-term 'dream' Re-applied for place after rejection from ITE u/g programme. *crosses-fingers Disappointment.
19.	Lack of self-confidence.	J	*But I didn't get into the teacher training degree programme when I first applied to Uni.*	
20.		J	*So I decided to do this degree first, then a PGCE later. Yep. Fingers crossed!*	
21.		**R**	**That's helpful. Thank you.**	
22.		**R**	**To start off then, can you tell me how many AFTs you have experienced and the circumstances surrounding them please?**	
23.	Pride	J	*Yes – sure. I've failed two assignments since being here…. One in my first year and one in the second year – last semester.*	Failed two assignments
24.	Concerns about academic ability	J	*I'm not proud of that fact. I feel like it's a bit of self-fulfilling prophecy – as I was always worried about whether I would be academic enough for university.*	Shame of failure "Self-fulfilling Prophecy"
25.		J	*But…I'm looking on the bright side. I am still here! [laughs]*	Positive outlook but future is about luck, good fortune?
26.		R	**For the purposes of the interview, are you happy to talk about both AFTs or would you be more comfortable discussing one over the other?**	
27.		J	*Hmm…it might be easier to talk about this last one, the one in my second year, cos its more recent. But it's no big deal – I'm happy to discuss both if that's helpful?*	
28.		R	**Thank you. Can you start by outlining why you sought an AFT in your first year?**	
29.	Finite evaluation of performance.	J	*Of course. In my first year, in the first semester, I really flunked out on an essay. I think I got thirty percent or near that.*	Grade related disappointment 'flunked out'
30.	Denial?	J	*The tutor's feedback was so bad I couldn't bring myself to read it especially as I knew all the stupid mistakes I had made.*	'Bad' feedback 'stupid mistakes'
31.		J	*I was really stressed - as it was so cringe seeing all my tutor's comments.*	*Tutor's* feedback (not *her* feedback)?

32.	Tutor's expectations Tutor focused	J	*I had totally misunderstood what the tutor wanted us to do in the essay and – yeah – I just got it badly wrong…*	Misunderstanding what the tutor wanted to read in assignment.
33.		**R**	**You say your feedback was 'bad' on that first-year assignment?**	
34.	Feedback supportive – corrective emphasis Anxiety	J	*Oh – I mean – that it was long and full of all the errors and mistakes I made. I'm getting myself confused here! [laughs].*	Detailed feedback
35.		J	*Sorry. I didn't mean the quality of the feedback was bad. It was really good!*	'Gone wrong"
36.		J	*Our feedback is usually really helpful, as the tutors here always pick-up on things you can do better and where you have gone wrong.*	Positive feedback Mainly corrective "Feeling depressed"
37.		J	*But, when I failed that essay, I was feeling like… I was depressed if I'm honest. Totally stressed out. I couldn't see the light at the end of the tunnel.*	Concerns about place on the course
38.		J	*I just thought I was going to be told that was it….my place on the course gone. I think I was just panicking cos I didn't know what I was to do next.*	Confusion as to how to access support
39.		**R**	**What did you do? Can you remember?**	
40.	Panic and stress 'Brave face' Peer support (Programme leader sign-positing support)	J	*After a lot of panicking – I thought I just had to face up to it and put on a brave face.*	Panic 'Brave face' Support from friends and programme leader Email communication
41.		J	*So, hmm, I think I took advice of some of my friends at the time and emailed the course leader to ask what I needed to do.*	
42.		J	*It was on her advice that I emailed the module tutor – the one that marked my essay – to ask if I could go through the points in the feedback.*	
43.		**R**	**How did you feel when you sent that email?**	
44.	Contradictory feelings (relief and worry) Inconvenience of having to deal with failure. Denial?	J	*Hmm…I think a bit of a mixture if I'm honest.*	Relief and Worry Ignoring the failure 'Getting on'
45.		J	*Like…I was relieved that I was going to get things sorted but I also would have preferred just not to have had to deal with it all…You know…?*	
46.		**R**	**Can you explain that a little more for me?**	
47.	Managing emotions Self-imposed isolation Feeling like giving-up	J	*Sure…hmm…I think you go either way when you get a bad grade, don't you?*	Managing the emotional impact of receiving a failure. 'Bury head' and 'Shut the world away'.
48.		J	*I mean, you can either think…'I need to sort this out' or, more usually for me, you want to shut the world away for a bit and bury your head.*	
49.	Self-isolation Reassurance Tutor intervention	J	*I didn't even want to come into lectures or even go to the library as I wanted damage limitation!*	Being left alone.

50.		J	*That's when you need to talk through the assessment with a tutor.*	Retracting from the University.
51.		J	*So they [tutors] can make sure you don't end up chucking it all away and drifting off.*	'Drifting off'
				Retention?
52.		**R**	**You say 'damage limitation' from what?**	
53.	Peer pressure	J	Hmm…I just didn't want everyone asking how I did and what I was going to do.	Peer pressure
54.	Completion	J	I don't know. I suppose I didn't want the fuss	Concern = fuss?
55.		J	…or other people thinking that I wasn't coping.	Other failure brings some comfort that J was not alone or different.
56.	Self-protection of identity (embarrassed)	J	I think that was worse in the first year rather that the second year as you know people better.	
57.		J	So, you aren't so guarded.	
58.	Familiarity with peer group	J	You also know that other people have failed too…so, yeah, it doesn't feel like such a big thing in some ways.	Wanted to be left alone.
59.		J	I really wanted to just get on…	
60.		**R**	**Can you remember, back in that first-year tutorial, how your tutor helped you through those feelings?**	
61.	Academic and pastoral reassurance	J	*Hmm…Mainly, I think, he just reassured me that one failed assignment wasn't the end of the world and that I had plenty of time to sort things out.*	"Not the end of the world".
62.	Putting failure into context	J	*I also think, cos I was in the first year, he also helped me understand the process of what was to happen next.*	Tutor putting the failure into context.
63.	University progression policy and process	J	*Yes…that really helped, as I then understood it was not over at that point. I think that's where it was different to the tutorial I had in the second year…*	Explaining progression processes
64.		**R**	**How about the second year one. Can you tell me a little about that one please?**	
65.	Disappointment linked to grade being counted towards final degree classification	J	*Sure. The one I just failed? Yes, of course. Hmmm...I was really disappointed, just like the first one I failed.*	Less panic – more frustration?
66.		J	*But this time [second year failure] I only just failed, as I got 38 percent. In a way that made it more frustrating – having failed only by two percent!*	Linked to overall grade.
67.	More familiar with process and policy	J	*But, I wasn't quite as panicky as in the first year, as I knew what happens with the summer exam board you see.*	Status of the failure raised due to second year module.
68.	Avoid future failure /corrective feedback	J	*So…hmm…when I went to see the tutor, I felt a little more confident.*	
69.		J	*But, that said, as it was a second-year module*	
70.			*- it was more important to my overall grade*	
71.			*than the first year so it was important I*	

72.			*understood where I went wrong and how I could avoid doing that in my next assignments.*	"Went wrong" (again no positive reflections)
73.		**R**	**Is that what you hoped to gain from that meeting with your marking tutor? In your second-year tutorial…**	
74.	Future grade improvement	J	*Hmm…Yes. That and to get some advice on what I needed to do next to improve my writing… as that's a big worry for me.*	Advice and guidance from the tutor
75.	Academic writing Corrections		*When we went through all the mistakes I made the tutor showed me ways in which I could have done it...*	'Right and wrong'
76.	Modelling and examples or corrections		*That's really the most useful thing about the tutorial set-up.*	Tutor shows students correct ways
77.			*Your tutor can show you how you can improve and give some examples.*	
78.	*Useful aspect of DF.		*You don't usually get that in just written feedback.*	
79.		**R**	**So far, we have been talking about a kind of feedback that is often termed dialogic feedback.**	
80.		**R**	**I'd like your thoughts on what this means to you. So, first, can you tell me what you think the term dialogue means?**	
81.	Talking/chatting/ discussing	J	*Hmm…dialogue is talking through something isn't it?*	Chatting, discussing
82.	With tutor/another		*Like…chatting with your tutors…I think of it as sitting down – like this – to discuss things with someone.*	Addressing issues and/or problems.
83.	Verbal interaction Purposeful	J	*Yeah. Like chatting about issues you might be having or problems you want to talk about.*	Talking about problems (resolving them?) Problem solving
84.		**R**	**Thank you. Some people think you can have a dialogue with yourself…how do you feel about that idea?**	
85.		J	*Well, I do talk to myself all of the time around my house [laughs] but I wouldn't think of that as dialogue.*	Disagrees with idea of dialogue with self.
86.	Purposeful	J	*No. I think I would have to disagree with that.*	
87.		J	*It's more like a conversation with someone.*	
88.	Advice/guidance	J	*Talking with each other. You know? Not like just thinking about it to yourself as dialogue means getting other people's advice or opinions.*	Response needed for dialogue from other.
89.		J	*Yeah. That's really important*	
90.		**R**	**So, with this is mind, and from your experiences of AFTs, how would you describe what dialogic feedback is?**	
91.	Clarifying feedback	J	*Hmm…It's when you fail your essay or assessment and you need to go through your*	Softening the blow of failed grade.

	Correctional feedback		*feedback, with your tutor, to help put into context the grade you got and how 'good' or bad' it was.*	Conversation/chat (informal)
92.	Contextualising grade	J	*Hmmm…so an opportunity for the tutor to explain why they gave you the mark you got.*	
93.	Status of tutor's opinions/understanding tutors.	J	*As you can chat to them about this, you can better understand it from their perspective.*	
94.		J	*You know…what they had wanted to see [in the assignment] and what you had left out or got wrong.*	"What the tutor had wanted to see…"
95.		J	*…You get to know where you had gone right and wrong.*	
96.	Emotional support	J	*Oh yes! I would also add that dialogic feedback can be used for emotional support too.*	
97.		J	*Like I explained, if I hadn't gone to my tutor to discuss the failure I might not be here now!*	
98.		**R**	**Thank you. Can you describe how the content and/or the agenda of the AFT you attended were decided and by whom?**	
99.	Tutor leads feedback	J	*Oh yes. There is really no agenda as such.*	Tutor goes through annotations, checking students understanding
100.			*Usually, the tutor goes through the points they raised in the feedback or in the comments they make on your paper [annotations] and then ask you if you have any questions… [breaks off]*	
101.	Presenting positive image	J	*Err…I know this sounds a bit lame…*	Looking prepared and in control for the tutor? (*pick-up in next interview)
102.	*Strategic?	J	*…but I did take in my essay with my highlighter points all over it hoping my tutor believed that I have made some attempt to address their feedback [laughs] before meeting with them.*	
103.			*I know I'm not the only one to do this [laughs] but I wanted to appear as if I was taking control you see…silly really.*	
104.		**R**	**And did it make you feel in control?**	
105.	Appearing prepared to tutor.	J	*Hmm…kind of I suppose.*	Gaining comfort from 'acting' as if in control?
106.	Fake?		*I felt like I was more prepared even if it was a bit fake [laughs]… but not really any more in control, no.*	
107.		**R**	**You were saying before there was no agenda in the meeting, so can you describe what happens.**	
108.	Systematic	J	*Oh yes…sorry… In both of my meetings the tutor read through their annotations and comments…*	Check-list Thorough and organised
109.		J	*…and stopped to explain them if I had any doubt or I didn't understand them.*	
110.		J	*Hmm…Like a check-list.*	
111.		J	*Yeah. I'd say this is what most commonly happens in the tutorial.*	

112.		R	**Whilst your tutor goes through the points in the feedback, what were you doing?**	
113.		R	**What did you see your role as at that point?**	
114.	Retaining advice (recording)	J	*I think you just try to take it all in really.*	Note-taking role
115.			*I took notes most of the time or scribbled bits on the essay*	Gathering and recording advice
116.			*You do realise how busy the tutors are and so you want to make the most of their expert support… especially….*	Busy tutors / time is precious
117.		R	**Especially?**	
118.	Student takes notes in case of referral	J	*I was going to say, hmm…especially if you have to resubmit your essay.*	Resubmission possibility
119.		J	*In that case, you want to make sure you have got all of their [tutor's] tips down.*	Tutor's "tips"
120.	Insurance?	J	*Of course you might not know that at the time of the tutorial so it's even more important to take note…*	Advice becomes more necessary and valuable
121.		R	**You wouldn't normally know this until after the summer exam board right?**	
122.	Strategic purpose (linked to progression and re-submission)	J	*Yes – so that's why I always tell people [peers] to go and speak to their tutor after getting a bad grade.*	Purpose of AFT to ensure quality of re-submission is raised to "pass" level
123.		J	*You need to get the advice in case you are expected to re-submit it you see.*	
124.		R	**Thank you for clarifying that for me.**	
125.		R	**Can you describe how you felt when discussing your feedback with your tutor?**	
126.	Anxiety	J	*Nervous! I'm not going to lie.*	Nerves
127.		J	*You do feel like the only one who has failed and had to get extra help.*	Alone, different from the norm
128.	Feeling like a 'failure'	J	*I know that sounds so silly but… Hmm…*	
129.	Impact on others	J	*Yeah. You know. You have such high hopes of making a new start and then the first thing you do is fail.*	Aspiration and hopes dashed
130.	Future aspirations of becoming a teacher dashed?	J	*I just felt like a lot of people had been let down in the first place and then also I was thinking I'd really let myself down too.*	"a lot of people"
131.			*I've wanted to come here [university] so much and it's my dream to be a teacher you see.*	Let down those closest to her.
132.	Degree required		*So I need the degree you see.*	The need to pass the degree to go onto future training.
133.		R	**Who did you feel like you let down?**	
134.		J	*Oh definitely - my daughter!*	Feeling anxious that she wasn't' letting her daughter down.
135.	Multiple identities linked to being a mother, mature student and future teacher.	J	*I kept thinking - if I had been told to leave - how I would explain to her Mummy was not going to her own school [university] in the morning*	

136.	Becoming a role model	J	*But then I thought… I tell my daughter every day that, if she is stuck at school, then she needs to tell the teacher who was there to help her.*	Both 'learners' – J to act as role model (student, mother and future teacher).
137.		J	*So, I guess I feel like the pressure is on for me to be a bit of a role model*	
138.		J	*I always tell her if I've been to speak with my tutor now.*	
139.		J	*I want her to know it's Ok to ask for help you see.*	
140.		**R**	**That's a really positive way to look at it…**	
141.		J	*Yes…I think that's the beauty of the tutorial in a way.*	DF affords opportunity to relay some pressures of being a mature student.
142.	Pressure of being a mature student	J	*I mean, being a mature student, I think sometimes you need to talk to another person [tutor] more my own age.*	
143.		J	*…to get a sense of perspective – does that make sense?*	
144.		**R**	**Yes, but can you explain a little more please?**	
145.	Talking to tutor (age)	J	*I think it's easier to talk to someone who would understand my doubts about my own ability…*	Able to relate to tutors more easily due to perspective of them being of similar age/ greater life-experience.
146.	Tutor understanding of pressures of mature students (with children)	J	*…and get that I am also a mum with a hundred different jobs to do…*	
147.		J	*I'm not being negative about younger people on the course…it's, just that I find that easier sometimes…*	Understanding of the pressures of parenthood.
148.		**R**	**What specifically did you find easier in the AFT?**	
149.	Peer pressure	J	*I felt it was really helpful and supportive.*	Asking questions in front of peers.
150.		J	*You see…in the normal classroom, it's often too embarrassing to stop the tutor mid-flow*	
151.	Embarrassment	J	*I just don't have the confidence to raise my hand.*	Competition?
152.	Confidence? Personal/private space of AFT.	J	*Although no-one wants to fail an assignment and have to have an AFT... the support you get in the tutorial can be a bit of a silver-lining, if that makes sense?*	Low-levels of confidence to stop tutor to ask questions.
153.		**R**	**I can see the point you're making. So, how does this form of feedback compare to other forms of feedback… for example just written feedback?**	
154.	DF highly valuable	J	*Oh! One hundred percent I prefer talking through with the tutor.*	Questions can be answered in DF/AFT.
155.		J	*No question!*	

156.	Verbal interaction	J	*Yeah, it's the beauty of being able to ask questions you might have and then getting a direct answer…*	Written feedback restrictive in not being interactive.
157.	*Understanding comments in written feedback.	J	*And… even if you still don't understand… you can ask them again.*	
158.		J	*That's why it's so useful. For me anyway.*	
159.		J	*Written feedback is not like that, is it? It's sort of 'one-way'.*	Written feedback can be difficult to understand – decipher (*pick-up in next interview)
160.			*The tutor writes what they think and you have to go through it. Whether you understand it or not. There's no opportunity really for come-back…*	
161.		**R**	**Could you email your tutor if you have a question or concern?**	
162.	Immediacy of the support offered in DF helps to reduce stress/anxiety.	J	*Yes. And I have done that before…*	Email potentially inefficient – leading to additional frustration
163.		J	*But…You know how busy tutors are so you don't want to bother them with something that might be quite minor*	
164.		J	*Also. It can be a bit frustrating to be honest if it takes ages for the reply….*	
165.		**R**	**So would you prefer just dialogic feedback over having written feedback?**	
166.	Reassurance?	J	*Hmm…Yes and no [laughs]. I mean.*	'Hold' feedback
167.			*I guess by having the written feedback you have something…permanent.*	Physicality of the written feedback
168.	Lack of confidence and trust in oneself?		*To sort of hold?*	
169.			*Err…I mean a reminder.*	
170.			*You can go back to it over and over again if you want.*	DF onus on the student to make notes and record the advice given.
171.	Status of tutor's words?		*You can't do that with dialogic feedback though.*	
172.			*So both would be best. That or the tutor could video the DF meeting I suppose*	
173.		**R**	**Thank you. I think we will end this interview at this point Jenny. We will be able to pick-up on some of the points you raised in the next interview.**	
174.		**R**	**However, before we end, is there anything you feel you would like to add or explain further?**	
175.	Positive relationships with tutors	J	*Hmm… no nothing really. It's really got me thinking though…*	Caring tutors
176.	Trusting	J	*Oh yes. Just one thing. I think it's really important that the tutors get recognised for all the help they give us.*	
177.		J	*The ones on our course are so kind – even when they are really busy.*	Kindness
178.		J	*You trust what they are saying as they have the experience don't they?*	Supportive/trust
179.		J	*They always offer to help… whenever you need it. I think that needs to come out.*	Linked to tutor's experience.

Appendix 8: Example of coding table example from scoping and follow-up interviews (Tom)

Key:

Line numbers in *italics* = from scoping interview

Line numbers underlined = from follow-up interview.

Research question	Emergent themes	Sub-themes	Lines	Main themes	Idiographic data
1 Nature of DF	Additional support mechanism.	Additional opportunity offered by marking tutor.	*16, 38-42 210* 2 12 98.	TALKING THROUGH ADVICE AND GUIDANCE GIVEN ON WRITTEN FEEDBACK	"Bolt-on" (Not for all students, not part of the curriculum experience)
	Voluntary tutorial at the students' request.	Student's decision whether to take up offer of AFT.	*3, 119-129 182,* 16-17 43-44		"Awkwardness" (Regarding the invitation to meet to chat with the tutor. The duality of the nature and purpose of the AFT)
	Student initiated meeting.	Student to take responsibility for contacting marking tutor (email).	*101-203.* 21-22 71		

	High status of the AFT due to it being grade related.	AFT highly valued due to it being directly related to academic performance.	*90, 172-173,* *13-14* *24-25.* *166*		
2 Purpose of DF	Understanding errors and mistakes.	Improving future grade performance.	*11-12* *229-230* *5,* *11-18,* *95-96*	BETTERING FUTURE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN ASSESSMENT	"…most important part of study" (Grade emphasis) "Immediately" (Timing of correctional advice) "Minor" and "bigger" (Defining errors and mistakes. Cumulative impact of minor mistakes)
	What the tutor expected to be included within the assignment.	Better understanding of tutor's expectations.	*79-82* *130-132.*		
	Clarifying errors and corrections on assignment.	Differentiating minor and major mistakes in assessment.	*66, 89.* *444-445* *14,* *38,* *120-129*		

	Timing of AFT.	AFTs providing swift and immediate support.	*44, 102 117* 165		
3 Feelings and emotions of DF	Pressure of failing a module.	Embarrassment due to failure.	*32, 53-54,* 16 74-75 147, 159	ANXIETY AND LOW MOTIVATION	"Being mocked" (Importance of academic understanding, linked to identity and membership of learning community) "Spotlight" (Exposure, under scrutiny from tutors). "Embarrassment of failure" (Key impact of receiving failed grade). "Low ebbs" (Expression of how Tom felt pre-AFT).
	Under scrutiny from marking tutor, peers and friends.	Feeling scrutinised by others.	*17-18-, 183* 9, 10, 188-189		
	Experiencing feelings of stress and worry.	Anxiety and stress.	*22, 80, 323* 71-73 205,		
	Feelings of low motivation.	Low energy and motivation to act upon feedback.	*88 200* 67-68 199		
	Feeling worthless and	Self-doubt / low self confidence	*86-87,*		

	not good enough to be on the course.		*422,* 32- 33 100		
4 Tutor's role in DF	Tutor's experience in support of students.	Respect for tutor's knowledge and experience.	*155, 156, 157,* 6, 10, 99, 222,	TUTOR ACTS AS AUTHORITATIVE SUPPORT	"What they had in mind" (Gaining insight into tutors' expectations)
	Tutor's academic authority.	Assumption that tutor has 'answers'.	*11* *212* 44 203		"Being prepared before the AFT" (Not wanting to appear unprepared)
	Kindness and supportive nature of tutors.	Academic and emotional reassurance from the tutor.	*97* *186,* *187,* 89- 91		
	Tutors offering direct advice that students can respond to.	Direct academic advice as to actions needing to be taken.	*2* *14* *40,* *74,* 11 88, 166,		

Appendix 9: Table of master themes

Participant	Main theme for research question 1	Main theme for research question 2	Main theme for research question 3	Main theme for research question 4
Tom	Talking through advice and guidance given on written feedback.	Bettering future academic performance in assessment.	Anxiety and low motivation.	Trusting tutor to act as authoritative support.
Jenny	Voluntary opportunity to speak with tutor to clarify feedback.	Avoiding assessment failure and gaining better marks in future assessments.	Stress and low self-confidence.	Student listens, and acts upon, experienced advice of tutor.
Matt	A verbal exchange with tutor, requested by student, to identify strengths and weaknesses in assignment.	Understanding errors to improve future academic performance.	Self-doubt and feeling of low self-confidence.	Tutor directs feedback, student responds to corrections given.
Teresa	Voluntary meeting with tutor to discuss written feedback and clarifying errors.	Improving grades and grade performance thus preventing further failure.	Feelings of insecurity and uncertainty regarding future place on course	Tutor provides advice and guidance for student to use.
Conor	Talking with tutor about assessment feedback.	Gain understanding of errors and corrections in order to improve future assessment performance.	Questioning self and decisions made in the lead up to assessment.	Tutor's experience and expertise, guides students through corrections.
Lisa	Listening and responding to tutor's advice, as to how to improve academic performance.	Understanding tutor's feedback to ensure mistakes are not repeated in future.	Lacking in self-confidence and self-belief.	Student responds to tutors' authoritative feedback offered.
David	Student initiated discussion, with marking tutor, to discuss feedback.	Identifying weaknesses in understanding and addressing them to avoid future failure.	Feeling isolated and seeking reassurance from tutor.	Tutor has a responsibility to lead the feedback, to support student

Appendix 10: Final table of recurrent main themes and sub-themes

	Research questions	Main themes	Sub-themes
1	*What do undergraduate students understand the nature of dialogic feedback to be?*	A verbal exchange	1.1 A semi-formal act of speaking and listening
			1.2 A purposeful verbal exchange, focused upon the summative assessment feedback with marking tutor
			1.3 An effective and efficient form of feedback
			1.4 A verbal exchange, located within voluntary assessment feedback tutorials
			1.5 A supportive discussion to address failed and/or weak academic performance
2	*How do undergraduate students understand the purpose of dialogic feedback?*	To improve future grades and prevent further failure	2.1 To understand the right way of knowing and doing
			2.2 To correct poor academic practice
			2.3 To gain support for weak subject knowledge
3	*How do undergraduate students describe their emotions and feelings relating to dialogic feedback experiences?*	Feelings of low self-confidence	3.1 Feelings of exposure
			3.2 Feelings of anxiety
			3.3 Feelings of apathy
4	*Within the context of dialogic feedback, how do undergraduate students perceive their relationship with the marking tutor?*	Students' perceptions of students as novice and tutors as expert.	4.1 Tutor leading the feedback
			4.2 Building students' self-belief, through trusting relationships
			4.3 Seeking reassurance through pastoral support
			4.4 Getting motivated